THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRUST

Why Rural Matters 2005

The facts about rural education in the 50 states

Jerry Johnson, Ed.D, State and Regional Policy Studies Manager
Marty Strange, Policy Director
Rural School and Community Trust

A Report of the Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program

May 2005

Why Rural Matters 2005

The facts about rural education in the 50 states

Jerry Johnson, Ed.D, State and Regional Policy Studies Manager
Marty Strange, Policy Director
Rural School and Community Trust

A report of the Rural School and Community Trust Policy Program
May 2005

Why Rural Matters 2005

The facts about rural education in the 50 states

Publication of this report is funded in part by the Annenberg Foundation.

To order a hard copy of this publication for a $35 fee, please contact the Rural School and Community Trust at:

Rural School and Community Trust
1530 Wilson Blvd., Suite 240
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: (703) 243-1487
Fax: (703) 243-6035
E-mail: info@ruraledu.org

A PDF version is available for free at the Rural Trust's website at www.ruraledu.org

Editor: Alison Yaunches

The Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) is the leading national nonprofit organization addressing the crucial relationship between good schools and thriving rural communities. Working in some of the poorest, most challenging rural places, the Rural Trust involves young people in learning linked to their communities, improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, advocates for appropriate state educational policies, and addresses the critical issue of funding for rural schools.

Contents

Executive Summary

Why Rural Matters 2005 is the third in a series of reports analyzing the importance of rural education in each of the 50 states and calling attention to the urgency with which policymakers in each state should address the problems of rural education.

In 2002-2003, 27% (12.5 million) of public school students attended school in communities of fewer than 25,000 and 19% (8.8 million) attended school in smaller communities of fewer than 2,500. In this report, we focus on the schools in those smaller communities, the most rural schools in America.

We framed the report around 22 statistical indicators grouped into four gauges measuring: (1) the relative *importance* of rural education, (2) the level of *poverty* in rural schools, (3) other socio-economic *challenges* faced by rural schools, and (4) the *policy outcomes* achieved in rural education. Policy outcomes include both student achievement measures (NAEP scores and graduation rates) and structural factors that both influence student outcomes and are within the control of policymakers to be "policy outcomes," such as student-teacher ratios, organizational scale of schools and districts, and per pupil spending on instruction.

The higher the ranking on a gauge, the more important or the more urgent rural education matters are in that state.

In sum, the results for each gauge are:

Importance: Half of the states where rural education is most important to the overall educational performance of the state are either in the Great Plains or the Midwest (South Dakota, Montana, North Dakota, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Kansas). Others are scattered in Northern New England (Maine and Vermont), Central Appalachia (West Virginia and Kentucky), the Mid-South Delta (Mississippi), and the Southeast (North Carolina).

Poverty: More than half of all rural students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in 11 states. States with highest rural poverty rates are in the Southeast and Mid-South Delta (Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama), the Great Plains (Oklahoma, North Dakota, and South Dakota), Central Appalachia (Kentucky and West Virginia), and the Southwest (New Mexico and Arizona). Hawaii and Idaho are also among the states with the poorest rural population.

Challenges: Rural schools face challenges associated with factors other than poverty, including students with disabilities, students who cannot speak English well, and minority students disadvantaged by generations of racial and ethnic discrimination. Five of the 13 states with the most severe non-poverty challenges are in the Southeast (Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana) and seven more are located in the West and Southwest (New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California, Hawaii, and Oklahoma).

Policy Outcomes: Eight of the 13 states with the worst policy outcomes are located east of the Mississippi River, mostly in the Southeast (Louisiana, Florida, Delaware, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and West Virginia). Three are in the West (Hawaii, California and Oregon), and two in the Southwest (Arizona and New Mexico).

Rural Education Priority Gauge

We combined the four gauge rankings to determine an overall ranking, which we term the Rural Education Priority Gauge. The top quartile on this gauge includes states in quintessentially rural regions of the country: the Mid-South Delta (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas), the Southeast (South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina), the Southwest (New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Arizona), and Central Appalachia (Kentucky and West Virginia).

No state scores in the highest quartile on all four gauges, but six score in the highest quartile on three of the gauges (New Mexico, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Arizona, and Oklahoma). The lowest ranking states on the Rural Education Priority Gauge are urban states in the East and in the Great Lakes Region.

Other Major Findings

Adequacy and Equity in Spending: Nine of the 10 states that spend the least on instruction per rural stu-

dent are also among the one-half of the states whose overall spending per student varies least among rural schools. In other words, all of their rural schools are meagerly funded. By contrast, nine of the 10 states that spend the most on instruction in rural schools are also among the one-half of states with the greatest disparity in spending among rural schools.

Graduation Rates: Less than 50% of South Carolina's rural students graduate in four years, the lowest rate in the nation, and just over 90% of Nebraska's graduate in four years, the highest rate in the nation. In general, Plains and Midwest states have high graduation rates and the lowest graduation rates are among Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western states.

NAEP Test Scores: States with the lowest rural NAEP scores are located primarily in the Southwest, West, and Southeast (in order, New Mexico, Mississippi, Alabama, Hawaii, Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, California, Nevada). States with the highest rural NAEP scores are primarily in the Northeast, followed by the Great Plains and the Great Lakes regions.

The Gap between Challenges and Performance

We calculated the "gap" between a state's ranking on the Policy Outcomes Gauge and its ranking on the Poverty and Challenges Gauges. The worst policy outcomes relative to challenges and poverty ("underachievers") come from rural schools in states that have large urban populations. By contrast, the states where policy outcomes were strong despite challenges and high poverty ("overachievers") are predominantly rural states, especially those with small independent rural school districts.

Killing the Goose that Lays the Golden Egg

Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming are all overachieving states with low "gap" scores. The rural schools in these states are doing well (in terms of policy outcomes) relative to poverty levels and other challenges they face. It is no coincidence that rural education in these states is characterized by smaller organizational scale (lower student-teacher ratio, smaller schools, and smaller districts), a characteristic that research suggests is a contributor to positive outcomes like higher graduation rates. These five states have graduation rates among the nation's highest. Because their rural schools and students do well, none of these states is identified as a Leading priority state in this report.

But these rural schools are very much "at-risk" nonetheless. Often scolded for being too small and "inefficient," they are threatened with forced consolidation and fiscal asphyxiation. Yet they do exceptional work with limited resources. Policy decisions that undermine these rural schools would clearly be a case of killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

Ignoring Country Cousins

Four contiguous northeastern states are among the top states on both the Poverty Gap and the Challenges Gap. Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio have large rural populations that are demographically overwhelmed by much larger urban populations. Less than one-fourth of the students in these states attend rural schools. Rural student achievement in these states is not absolutely poor, but neither is it strong given the relatively low barriers to achievement rural schools in these states face. This relatively low student achievement may be related to a consistent pattern of policy choices in these states. Rural schools and districts in all four of these states are above the median among states for organizational scale (large schools in large districts) and class size (student-teacher ratio). Maryland and Pennsylvania also rank high in the percentage of school expenditures on transportation and Ohio ranks second lowest in rural per pupil expenditure for instruction.

It appears that these states have adopted an urban large-school model in rural areas that is producing mediocrity in outcomes for students who are in a position to do better. Although these are demographically "urban" states, they are home to nearly 1.3 million students who attend rural schools (nearly 15% of all rural students in the U.S.).

Policy Recommendations

This report provides policymakers and advocates with an opportunity to see rural education in their state, both as it is and as it compares to rural education in other states. There are certain patterns in the data in this report and from other research that suggests common issues we believe are most worthy of consideration by policymakers. Some recommendations are below.

■ **Scale of Schooling – Keeping small schools.**
Because a large body of research shows that smaller schools and smaller districts are more effective, especially in addressing the educational needs of low-income communities, policymakers must find ways to fabricate the advantages of large scale without losing the intimacy, accountability, and engagement that are the blessings of small schools. Smallness should be recognized for what it is—a cost-effective educational strategy, especially in low-income communities.

■ **Poverty – Reducing poverty's power over student achievement.**
Poverty is the strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement. Most states provide additional funding to schools based on poverty levels, but it is almost always too little. The cost associated with teaching low-income children most likely rises disproportionately as the poverty rate increases. Some states acknowledge this, but most do not. In the highest poverty areas—rural and urban—the need is greatest.

■ **Diversity – Addressing a changing population.**
Rural America is growing increasingly diverse, creating unique challenges in meeting the needs of all students. Rapid growth in English Language Learner student populations and lack of access to ELL training programs for teachers has left many rural schools and districts without qualified staff. Providing additional funds to schools and districts and training to teachers with ELL students is important.

■ **Outmigration and Population Decline – Keeping children and communities in mind.**
Many rural communities are rapidly losing population making it more difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers. But those who are "left behind" in such places have the same right to an education as those who leave. Appropriate policies include: maintaining close school-community relationships, making best use of distance learning, encouraging maintenance and repair of buildings and supporting use of schools for other compatible social services, encouraging interlocal cooperation, and limiting the length of bus rides children are forced to endure. Any state plan to reorganize schools and districts because of declining enrollment should be accountable to standards that have the interests of children and communities in mind.

■ **Facilities – Fulfilling a community need.**
Public school facilities can play a vital community role in supplying non-school agencies and community groups with the space and technology they need to provide these and other services. State supplied funding should reduce the effect of disparities in local property wealth. There should be no arbitrary minimum enrollment sizes, minimum acreage requirement, or preferences for new construction over renovation and repair.

■ **Technology and Distance Learning – Maximizing rural school effectiveness and efficiency.**
Distance learning is one strategy that has proven to be effective in ensuring that schools and districts are able to provide rich curricula without restructuring and uprooting students and communities. If rural schools and communities are to take advantage of the benefits offered by technology, they must have financial and policy assistance in developing and maintaining the kind of technology infrastructure, interlocal cooperation, and program coordination that will support the use of distance learning among clusters of rural schools.

Conclusion

It should not be necessary to argue "why rural matters." But the truth is that rural schools and communities are increasingly invisible in a mass society that is fundamentally preoccupied with its urban identity, its urban problems, and its urban future. You do not have to go beyond images of rural life in the media to see that our society is confused and naïve about rural America and its institutions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way our public policies relate, often as if by afterthought, to rural schools and communities. We hope that this report helps unveil the diverse and complex nature of rural education, as well as the disparities it often embodies, so that the needs of the 8.8 million students who attend rural schools will not be lost in ignorance or indifference.

Why Rural Matters 2005

The facts about rural education in the 50 states

Introduction

Why Rural Matters 2005 is the third in a series of reports by the Rural School and Community Trust analyzing the importance of rural education in each of the 50 states and calling attention to the urgency with which policymakers in each state should address the needs of rural schools and their communities.

In our first report, *Why Rural Matters,* we concluded that thinking and talking seriously about rural education as a policy issue is something that our society does not do very often. The second report, *Why Rural Matters 2003,* updated and expanded the first report and cited examples demonstrating that rural education was becoming slightly less marginalized. We suggested that perhaps we as a society were getting better at thinking and talking about rural education and rural education policy.

Here, we again update and expand the earlier reports in an attempt to (1) continue to provide the kinds of information and analyses that highlight states' priority needs with regard to rural-specific education policy, and (2) better describe the complexities of the rural context for education to more accurately comprehend the ways in which policy can reshape that context for the better.

In 2000-2001 (the data year used in the *Why Rural Matters 2003* report), 31% of the nation's children attended school in communities of fewer that 25,000 people, and 21% attended school in communities of fewer than 2,500. Updating those figures, we find that in 2002-2003, about 27% of children attended school in communities of fewer than 25,000 and 19% attended school in communities of fewer than 2,500.

The proportional decline in enrollment is substantial, and is the result of both actual decline in rural students (a loss of 149,833) and an increase in non-rural students (a gain of 87,186). Of note, gains in the non-rural category came in spite of enrollment loss in schools located in small town communities of 2,500 to 24,999. Thus, the general trend is one of students moving away from rural and small town communities and toward urban and suburban areas. Lest the argument be made that fewer students attending school in rural communities in some way lessens the importance of rural education, we need only consider this: 19% of the nation's student population still represents 8,797,497 children. The challenges and prospects of nearly nine million rural children are worthy of society's attention.

Gauging Rural Education in the 50 States

We framed the report around four gauges: (1) Importance, (2) Poverty, (3) Challenges, and (4) Policy Outcomes. Each gauge is comprised of several equally-weighted indicators.

To compute the indicator rankings, the states are ordered from 1 to 50, with "1" being the most important or most urgent and "50" being the least important or least urgent.

A high ranking on the Importance Gauge means rural matters a great deal in a state. A high ranking on the Poverty, Challenges, or Policy Outcomes gauges means there is cause for concern about rural education in the state.

The indicators used in the gauges are:

Importance Gauge

- Total number of students enrolled in rural schools
- Percentage of public school students enrolled in rural schools
- Percentage of public schools located in rural areas
- Percentage of public school students attending small rural schools
- Percentage of state's overall K-12 funding going to rural schools

The Data

The data we used for *Why Rural Matters 2005* were compiled primarily from information maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the U.S. Census Bureau[1] and merged into a single data set in order to create variables for each school and district in the U.S. All data used here are available to the general public and may be downloaded in electronic format.

To define rural, we used NCES locale codes 7 and 8. A school or district "that is physically located in a place outside of a metropolitan statistical area and has a population of fewer than 2,500 persons" is in locale code 7. Locale code 8 refers to "a school or district that is physically located in a place inside a metropolitan statistical area and has a population of fewer than 2,500 persons."

District data are less accurate than school data for measuring rural education. That is because the locale code designation for a school district is based on the physical location of the district office and not the location of its schools. Distinguishing rural from non-rural in district data is therefore less precise, and usually results in under-counting rural representation. For example, in many consolidated county-wide districts, schools in rural areas are governed by a district office located in a town with a population greater than 2,500. In these cases, locale 7 or 8 rural schools are counted as part of a locale 6 (small town with population 2,500 – 24,999) district. To put this imprecision into perspective, 8,797,497 students attend school in the 25,151 schools designated by NCES as rural, while 8,036,222 attend school in the 7,204 districts designated as rural. In this report, we use district-level data only in cases where school-level data is not collected (namely, for school finance variables).

We only used data for regular schools—public elementary/secondary schools that are non-charter and do not focus primarily on vocational, special, or alternative education. With regard to district-level data, we used regular local education agencies (local school districts and local school district components of supervisory unions) and excluded charter school-only districts.

Poverty Gauge

- Percentage of rural students who are eligible for subsidized meals
- Percentage of rural families with school-age children who are living below the federal poverty line
- Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children who are living below the federal poverty line
- Rural per capita income
- Rural per pupil property wealth

Challenges Gauge

- Percentage of the population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"
- Percentage of rural students who receive special education services
- Percentage of rural students who are minorities
- Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma
- Percentage of rural households with residence change in the previous 15 months

Policy Outcomes Gauge

- General fund revenue gap
- Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction
- Percentage of total current expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts
- Rural student-teacher ratio
- Median organizational scale (school enrollment x district enrollment, divided by 100)
- Rural four-year graduation rate
- Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8

In the number and content of gauges, this report differs considerably from previous versions of Why Rural Matters, and is not intended to be used in direct comparison. The possibilities for describing the status of rural education and rural education policy in the 50 states are virtually unlimited, and this report represents one approach, as do each of the previous reports in the series.

For each of the four gauges, all of the state rankings were added and then divided by the number of indicators to produce a cumulative ranking for each state. Based on that ranking, the states were then divided into quartiles that described their relative position with regard to other states on that particular gauge. For the Importance and Outcome gauges, the four quartiles are "Notable," "Important," "Very Important," and "Crucial." For the Poverty and Challenges gauges, the four quartiles are "Fair," "Serious," "Critical," and "Urgent" (See Tables 2-5).

Lastly, we combined the four gauge rankings to determine an overall ranking, which we term the Rural Education Priority Gauge (Table 6).

Results

The data for each state and the state rankings for each indicator are presented in the charts on pages 35-84.

The results are summarized and discussed below. To aid in making comparisons, the national level data for each indicator is presented in Table 1 below.

Importance Gauge Indicators

We define each of the indicators in the Importance Gauge and summarize state and regional patterns found in the data below.

- *The number of students enrolled in rural schools* is intended to serve as an absolute measure—as opposed to a relative measure—of the size of the rural student population. The indicator for each state represents the total sum of PK-12 student enrollment in all schools designated as rural by NCES. The higher the number, the higher the state ranks on this indicator in the Importance Gauge.

Table 1. National Rural Statistics

Importance Gauge	**U.S.**
Total number of students enrolled in rural schools (median: 148,579)	8,797,497
Percentage of public school students enrolled in rural schools	19.1%
Percentage of public schools located in rural areas	30.3%
Percentage of public school students attending small rural schools	8.7%
Percentage of state's overall K-12 funding going to rural schools	18.5%
Poverty Gauge	
Percentage of rural students who are eligible for subsidized meals	37.4%
Percentage of rural families with school-age children who are living below the federal poverty line	11.8%
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children who are living below the federal poverty line	35.5%
Rural per capita income	$19,285
Rural per pupil property wealth	$151,164
Challenges Gauge	
Percentage of the population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.4%
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.2%
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	22.2%
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	21.2%
Percentage of rural households with residence change in the previous 15 months	14.1%
Policy outcomes Gauge	
General fund revenue gap (median: $2,173)	$3,592
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,199
Percentage of total current expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.3%
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.0
Median organizational scale (divided by 100)	2,285
Rural four-year graduation rate	70.5%
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	499.2

More than half of all rural students attend school in just 13 states, including some of the nation's most populous and most urban states (Texas, Ohio, Michigan, New York, California, and Florida). The average rural enrollment for this group of 13 states is over 350,000—more than the total enrollment in each of 15 other states, including several that are typically thought of as rural. Texas has the nation's largest total rural enrollment with 532,378 students, just slightly less than the combined rural enrollments of Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

More than half of all rural students attend school in just 13 states, including some of the nation's most populous and most urban states.

- *The percentage of students enrolled in rural schools* is a relative measure of the size of the rural student population, and represents the percentage of all public school students who are enrolled in regular elementary and secondary schools designated as rural by NCES. The higher the percentage of rural school students, the higher the state ranks on the Importance Gauge.

The 13 states with the highest percentages of rural students serve more than two million students—about 40% of the total student enrollment in those states, and about 24% of the total rural enrollment in the U.S. The highest concentrations of rural students are found in four regions: Central Appalachia, the Great Plains, the Mid-South Delta, and Northern New England. North Carolina and Alabama are the only states to rank in the top quartile for both total rural enrollment and percentage rural enrollment. Together, the 760,643 rural students in these two states represent about 9% of the total rural student population in the U.S.

- *The percentage of public schools in rural areas* is the percentage of regular elementary and secondary public schools designated as rural by NCES. The higher the percentage of rural schools, the higher the state ranks on the Importance Gauge.

States vary widely with regard to the percentage of schools located within rural areas, from a low of 6% in Massachusetts to a high of 77% in South Dakota. Thirteen states have at least half of their schools located in rural areas, and at least one-third of all schools are rural in 14 other states. By and large, the highest percentages of rural schools are in states where sparse population and/or difficult terrain make school consolidation and transporting students to regional schools in non-rural areas difficult. The smallest percentages of rural schools are found in urban states on the East and West coasts.

- *The percentage of students attending small rural schools* is the percentage of students attending a rural public school with a cohort enrollment (average number of students per grade) below the median cohort enrollment for all U.S. schools. We use cohort enrollment to account for variations in grade span configuration (e.g., to distinguish between a K-12 school with 250 students and a K-3 school with 250 students). The higher the percentage of students attending small rural schools, the higher the state scores on the Importance Gauge.

The proportion of students attending small rural schools varies considerably, from 41.3% in South Dakota to 1.3% in Massachusetts. More than 20% of all students attend small rural schools in each of the 13 states ranked as Crucial on this indicator. States in or near the Great Plains region dominate the list of 13 (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa), followed by Northern New England (Vermont and Maine), along with Alaska, Arkansas, and West Virginia.

- *The percentage of state's overall K-12 funding going to rural schools* represents the proportion of overall state funding for education that goes to schools in districts designated as rural by NCES. We focus the analysis on state-derived general fund revenues that are used to support the day-to-day operations associated with conducting school (thus, long-term outlays like capital construction funds are excluded). The higher the percentage of state funding for rural education, the higher the state scores on the Importance Gauge.

Not surprisingly, states that rank high on percentage of rural schools and percentage of rural students tend to rank high on this indicator. There is some variation, however. Alaska ranks 10th here with 43% of all state funding for education going to support rural schools, while it ranks 21st in the percentage of schools located in rural areas (28%). Differences such as these probably result from the additional costs associated with providing

educational services to students in isolated and sparsely populated areas.

Importance Gauge Rankings

To gauge the importance of rural education to the overall educational performance of each state, we average each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each. The results are presented in Table 2.

Half of the 12 Crucial states (i.e., those in the highest ranking quartile) are located in the Plains and Midwest (South Dakota, Montana, North Dakota, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Kansas). Other regions represented in the top quartile of the Importance Gauge are Northern New England (Maine and Vermont), Central Appalachia (West Virginia and Kentucky), the Mid-South Delta (Mississippi), and the Southeast (North Carolina).

Two other Mid-South Delta states (Alabama and Arkansas) are at the top of the next quartile. In addition to the regions referenced above (8 of 13 states), the Very Important category includes the Great Lakes and the Northwest. The Important category (3rd quartile) includes some predominantly urban Northwest and Midwest region states with sizable rural populations. The Notable category (4th quartile) includes states with few rural students or a small percentage of rural students. Nine of these states are on the East or West Coast. Three others are located in the arid West where most people live in cities.

No state ranks in the highest quartile on all five indicators, but the six states with the highest Crucial ranking are in the highest quartile on four of the five indicators. In every case, the indicator for which the state ranked lower was the total rural enrollment indicator. Other states in the top quartile tended to rank lower on percentage of students enrolled in small rural schools (Mississippi, Kentucky, and North Carolina) and percentage of schools in rural areas.

The indicator that most frequently contributes to a high cumulative ranking is the percentage of public school students attending rural schools. The indicator that contributes least often (and, with the exception of North Carolina, not at all for the highest ranking quartile) is the total number of students enrolled in rural schools. The indicators here favor states where the relative size of the rural population is larger, regardless of the absolute size of the population. Nevertheless, including the total enrollment indicator provides some recognition of the large rural population in heavily urban states.

Poverty Gauge Indicators

Poverty is the single strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement, and an important enough concern that we give it a separate gauge in this report. The negative influence of poverty manifests in multiple ways—e.g., the economic well-being of families is closely related to the preparedness level of children entering school, while the economic well-being of communities (as reflected in local property values) is associated with the ability of the community to generate revenue to support its schools. Clearly, poverty as an influence over educational outcomes resists simple definitions, and so we measure it using multiple indicators. We define each

Table 2. Importance Gauge Cumulative Rankings*

How important is it to the overall educational performance of the state to address the particular needs of schools serving its rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The lower the number, the more important it is for policymakers to address rural school issues in that state.

Crucial		Very Important		Important		Notable	
ME	8.8	AL	15.2	GA	23.8	NY	33.6
SD	9.6	AR	15.2	ID	23.8	MD	33.8
VT	9.8	NE	17.2	MN	24.0	DE	38.8
MT	11.2	MO	17.6	MI	25.0	FL	39.2
WV	11.4	NH	17.6	PA	26.6	CT	39.2
ND	11.6	AK	18.6	LA	26.6	CA	40.0
IA	11.8	IN	19.6	TX	29.8	AZ	40.4
MS	12.8	TN	20.2	NM	31.4	HI	41.5
KY	13.0	WI	21.4	OR	31.6	UT	42.4
NC	13.2	OH	21.8	WA	32.0	NJ	43.2
OK	14.4	VA	22.2	IL	32.4	NV	44.2
KS	14.4	SC	22.2	CO	33.4	RI	47.0
		WY	22.8			MA	47.6

*numbers are rounded

of the indicators in the Poverty Gauge below, and summarize state and regional patterns discernible in the data.

Poverty is the single strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement.

- *The percentage of students eligible for subsidized meals* is the percentage of students in regular elementary and secondary schools who are eligible for participation in federal free or reduced-price meal programs. The higher the percentage of subsidized meal eligibility, the higher a state scores on the Poverty Gauge.

Subsidized meal rate is the most common measure of student poverty used in education research. It has limitations, namely that rates are subject to conditions unrelated to actual poverty levels, including willingness to apply for meal programs and the procedures that school officials use to secure applications. In general, the subsidized meal rate closely parallels other measures of poverty used in this analysis. It is a broader measure of household income stress than, say, percentage of families below the federal poverty line, and so it captures a sizable number of families in "near-poverty." More than half of all rural students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in 11 states—in descending order, Kentucky (76.4%), New Mexico (67.3%), Mississippi (65.6%), Louisiana (59.6%), Oklahoma (57.7%), West Virginia (55.5%), South Carolina (55.1%), Hawaii (54.4%), Alaska (51.1%), Alabama (51.1%), and Arkansas (50.1%). Rates are lowest among rural students in predominantly urban Northeast states.

- *The percentage of rural families with children living below the poverty line* is the percentage of rural families with children below age 18 whose family income level is below the federal poverty line. The higher the percentage of families living in poverty, the higher a state scores on the Poverty Gauge.

Rankings here parallel the subsidized meal rate rankings somewhat, but not exactly. They are considerably lower across the board, because the criteria for inclusion in this group are narrower, and therefore it excludes "near-poverty" families. We might think of the last indicator as a measure of the prevalence of poverty in the student body, and this indicator as a measure of its intensity. Of the 11 high poverty states from the previous indicator, 10 also rank in the top quartile on this one—in descending order, New Mexico (23.3%), West Virginia (21.9%), Mississippi (19.8%), Kentucky (19.7%), Louisiana (18.7%), Hawaii (17.5%), Alabama (16.7%), Arkansas (15.7%), Oklahoma (15.3%), and South Carolina (15.3%). The other (Alaska) ranks considerably lower, suggesting that the prevalence of poverty and near poverty is not matched by the intensity of the poverty that is present. Conversely, three states that did not rank as urgent on the meal rate indicator (Arizona, South Dakota, and Montana) do so here, suggesting that the intensity of poverty presents more of a challenge than its prevalence does.[2] Arizona, in fact, ranks 2nd in the nation on this indicator, with 22.6% of rural households with school-age children living in poverty.

- *The percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-aged children living below the poverty line* is the percentage of rural female-headed households with children under age 5 whose family income level is below the federal poverty line. This indicator captures poverty data related to one of the most at-risk populations (students from female-headed households) and at an age level where educational support is arguably most urgent (preschoolers). The higher the percentage of female-headed households with children under age 5 who are in poverty, the higher a state scores on the Poverty Gauge.

More than half of all rural female-headed households with children under age 5 are below the federal poverty line in 15 states. Rankings here parallel the rankings for percentage of poverty among rural families with children under 18. Again, there are notable exceptions. Both North Dakota and Idaho ranked outside the top quartile in the two previous poverty measures, yet rate as urgent for this one (in North Dakota, 61% of all such households live in poverty, the 2nd highest in the U.S.). This suggests the presence of severe income stress on this specific at-risk group and highlights the importance of strong preschool/early childhood education programs to meet the inherent challenges. Largely urban Northeast states again rank low on this indicator.

- *Rural per capita income* is the per capita income for people in rural areas, as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau. This indicator is not just a measure of poverty; it also offers a relative assessment of economic distress

and economic well being among rural people in each of the states. The lower the rural per capita income, the higher the state scores on the Poverty Gauge.

For the most part, the states identified as high poverty via the previous three indicators again rank high on this indicator. One state with high poverty levels (Arizona) does fall outside the Urgent category on this indicator, suggesting perhaps that there is somewhat more affluence—and thus greater disparity in income levels—in the state's rural communities. Conversely, another state that did not exhibit high levels of poverty (Utah) ranks in the Urgent category in terms of per capita income, suggesting perhaps a sizable population of "working poor" among rural people in that state.

- *Rural per pupil property wealth* is the total value of all owner-occupied property in rural areas divided by the total enrollment of rural students in regular elementary and secondary schools. This is commonly used as a measure of the property tax base available to communities for generating local revenues for schools. The lower the rural per pupil property wealth, the higher the state scores on the Poverty Gauge.

A number of states remain at the top of the list on this poverty indicator, which is really a measure of the fiscal capacity of school districts. Even among these states, however, there is a pattern to the poverty indicators. Within the category of the poorest states (i.e., those ranking consistently at or near the top on all five indicators comprising the Poverty Gauge), Southeastern and Mid-South Delta states tend to rank highest on family and household poverty (as measured by income) while the states in the Great Plains and Southwest rank highest on this poverty indicator (as measured by low property wealth). Texas does not rank as urgent on any of the income measures, but its $81,741 per pupil property wealth base is the 7th lowest in the U.S.

Poverty Gauge Rankings

To gauge the urgency of poverty as an influence over rural education in each state, we average each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each. The results are presented in Table 3.

In terms of regional patterns, the data here suggest that the influence of poverty is not confined to any one part of the U.S., but operates at levels worthy of attention from policymakers in each of several regions.

Four of the 13 Urgent states are located in the Southeast and Mid-South Delta (Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama) and three in the Great Plains (Oklahoma, North Dakota, and South Dakota). Two Central Appalachian states ranked as Urgent (Kentucky and West Virginia), as well as two Southwestern states (New Mexico and Arizona). The other two states in the highest ranking quartile are Hawaii and Idaho.

States with a Critical ranking (2nd quartile) include four from the Southeast region (South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida) and three from the Great Plains (Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska). Others were scat-

Table 3. Poverty Gauge Cumulative Rankings*

Given the economic conditions in the state's rural schools and communities, how urgent is it in each state that policymakers develop policies that target educational needs associated with poverty? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The lower the number, the more important it is for policymakers to address poverty-related educational issues in that state.

Urgent		Critical		Serious		Fair	
NM	4.2	MT	16.6	ME	25.2	VT	34.8
KY	5.0	MO	16.8	NC	25.8	DE	35.2
LA	5.2	TX	17.0	KS	27.4	IL	35.6
MS	5.2	SC	17.8	CA	28.0	MI	37.2
WV	5.4	UT	19.6	WA	28.4	IN	37.4
OK	7.8	TN	20.0	NV	31.6	WI	38.8
AR	8.2	GA	20.6	IA	32.2	CO	39.2
SD	9.8	WY	21.8	VA	32.4	NH	44.2
AL	10.6	AK	22.2	MN	32.8	MD	44.4
ND	11.4	FL	23.4	NY	33.0	RI	47.0
AZ	13.6	NE	24.6	PA	33.4	NJ	48.0
HI	15.0	OR	24.6	OH	33.8	MA	48.4
ID	15.8					CT	49.6

*numbers are rounded

tered across the Midwest (Missouri), Northwest (Alaska and Oregon), Southwest (Texas), and West (Utah).

In the Serious category (3rd quartile) Northern New England is represented for the first time in this indicator (Maine). Two additional Southeast states are ranked here (North Carolina and Virginia), along with two Western states (California and Nevada) and a handful of other states with no distinct regional pattern.

States scoring lowest on the Poverty Gauge (Fair) are, by and large, located in the East, including Northern New England (Vermont and New Hampshire) and the Great Lakes region (Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin). Colorado is the lone Western state included.

Six states rank in the highest quartile on all five poverty indicators (New Mexico, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Arkansas). West Virginia ranks just outside the highest quartile on one indicator (per pupil property values). North Dakota and South Dakota each rank outside the highest quartile on the subsidized meal rate indicator, a finding that may be affected by the fact that many small schools simply do not offer the school lunch or breakfast programs.

The indicator that most frequently contributes to a high cumulative ranking is the percent of poverty among rural families with children under age 18. The indicator that contributes least to a high cumulative ranking is per pupil property wealth. Our gauge favors the importance of income wealth over property wealth—an appropriate methodological decision given that lack of property wealth is mediated (in some states, and to varying degrees) through state aid programs that deliberately attempt to mitigate property wealth differences among districts by equalizing aid revenues.

Challenges Gauge Indicators

Poverty is not the only socio-demographic characteristic linked to educational outcomes, however, and so we include an additional gauge that captures characteristics that present challenges not directly related to wealth or income. These are some of the other characteristics typically employed in analyses of academic outcomes, especially achievement gaps between various groups of students. Disclosing the varying extents to which such characteristics exist in the rural schools of each state suggests a range of levels of urgency with which policymakers must approach achievement gap issues. Here, we define each of the indicators in the Challenges Gauge, and summarize state and regional patterns discernible in the data.

- *The percentage of the rural population aged 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"* is provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. In the context of this analysis, it serves as a measure of the English Language Learner (ELL) population in rural communities. The higher the percentage of rural people speaking English "less than very well," the higher the state scores on the Challenges Gauge.

Teaching children for whom English is not the native language is a challenge for educators—many of whom have not received specialized training—and ELL students typically demonstrate considerably lower levels of achievement than their non-ELL peers. Successful pedagogical approaches exist, but they require dedicated school staff and the support of policymakers (both financial and otherwise—e.g., through flexible assessment policies). New Mexico has the most extensive ELL population, at 14%, followed by Arizona at 12%. Other Southwestern and Western states rank high as well (10% of California's rural population are English Language Learners, as are 6.5% of rural people in Texas). The overall range among the 50 states is highly skewed: while the five states with the highest percentage range from 14% to 6.5%, 38 states have less than a 3% ELL population.

- *The percentage of rural students receiving special education services* is the percentage of students in rural schools who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), as reported by NCES. In the context of this analysis, it describes the population size of children in rural communities with exceptional educational needs related to cognitive or behavioral challenges. The higher the percentage of IEP students, the higher the state scores on the Challenges Gauge.

Teaching children with exceptional needs requires specialized skills, materials, and technology—three things that are not available in all schools. Federal and state policy on assessment (e.g., the requirement under No Child Left Behind to make Adequate Yearly Progress with the sub-population "IEP students") means that schools will be held accountable for improving the achievement levels of students with exceptional needs at rates at or

exceeding the improvement rates of non-IEP students. In Rhode Island, New Mexico, and Florida, nearly one-fifth of all rural students are designated as "special education" and require specialized services. Thirteen other states have 15% or larger IEP student populations, with no distinct regional patterns.

- *The percentage of rural students who are minorities* is the number of minority students (per NCES designations: Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native) as a percentage of the total population of all students in rural public schools. The higher the percentage of minority students, the higher the state scores on the Challenges Gauge.

Teaching children with exceptional needs requires specialized skills, materials, and technology—three things that are not available in all schools.

The track record for schools in meeting the needs of minority students is not good. Achievement gaps between white and non-white students—documented and analyzed extensively for nearly 30 years since the Coleman Report—persist. State and federal assessment and accountability policies mandate that schools demonstrate progress toward closing gaps, but policies to actually help schools make progress toward those goals are not always present. Disclosing the states with the largest (in relative terms) minority student populations in rural areas points to the states where the attention of policymakers is most crucial.

In three states (Hawaii, New Mexico, and Alaska), the traditional roles of minority and majority are reversed, with white students comprising less than 50% of the rural student population. Minority students comprise at least one-third of the rural student population in eight other states (Arizona, Mississippi, California, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Texas, and North Carolina). In all, 55% of all rural minority students attend school in these 11 states. Moreover, there is considerable diversity among states with regard to their respective minority populations. Two of the top three states rank high on the basis of their large population of indigenous peoples (Hawaii and Alaska). For other states (New Mexico, Arizona, and Oklahoma) combinations of Native American and Hispanic populations are prominent. Southern states in the urgent category are there largely on the strength of sizable African-American populations (Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina). While California is perhaps the nation's most ethnically diverse state, its rural minority population is predominately Hispanic.

- *The percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma* is the number of adults aged 19 and older who have not earned a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED), expressed as a percentage of the total rural population aged 19 and older. The higher the percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma, the higher the state scores on the Challenges Gauge.

This indicator tells us about the level of educational attainment among adults in rural areas of a state. In places where there are low levels of educational attainment, there is likely to be less interest in and/or support for public schools. Stretching the indicator a bit, we can make inferences about the educational attainment of parents and the historical quality of public education outcomes in the communities. States scoring highest on this indicator are some of the poorest states in the U.S. Kentucky heads the list with nearly one-third of all rural adults lacking a high school diploma or GED, followed by Mississippi (with 29.9% non-graduates), Alabama and Tennessee (29.4%), Louisiana (29.2%), West Virginia (28.6%), South Carolina (28.2%), Georgia (27.4%), Virginia and Arkansas (27%), and North Carolina (25.9%). The Southeast region's presence is obvious. Indeed, we go all the way to number 12 on the list before we get outside the region and one contiguous Appalachian neighbor (West Virginia). The other two states in the highest quartile are in the Southwestern region (Arizona and New Mexico).

- *The percentage of rural households changing residences in the previous 15 months* is the number of households who moved to their current residence within the 15 months preceding data collection for the 2000 Census. In the context of this study, it serves as a measure of household mobility, another non-educational variable that has been identified as a consistent predictor of educational outcomes. The higher the rate of mobility, the higher the state scores on the Challenges Gauge.

This indicator tells us something about the relative stability of rural communities, and by extension, about the

relative stability of the households of students in those communities. On average, schools that have high rates of student mobility tend to perform at lower levels than other schools. Children who are members of a transient household have needs—educational and otherwise—that are somewhat unique to their situations. Schools that serve large transient populations require specialized skills and additional resources to meet those unique needs. A definite regional pattern emerges here as well, with nine of the 10 highest ranking states in the West. In the top four states (Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, and Alaska), one in five children has changed residence within a 15-month-period. Following these four, 16 additional states have at least a 15% mobility rate (Hawaii, Florida, Wyoming, Utah, Texas, Montana, Arkansas, Georgia, Missouri, Oklahoma, California, New Mexico, Idaho, Washington, Alabama, and Tennessee). There is likely a close relationship between mobility rates and migrant student rates. Migrant students are another "at-risk" group identified often in educational research. The lack of available reliable data prevented us from including a migrant student indicator in the analyses.

Table 4. Other Challenges Gauge Cumulative Rankings*

Given the other challenges faced by the state's rural schools, how urgent is it in each state that policymakers develop policies that target educational needs associated with those challenges? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The lower the number, the more important it is for policymakers to address non-poverty challenges in that state.

Urgent		Critical		Serious		Fair	
NM	6.6	AK	18.8	CO	25.4	IL	32.2
FL	9.6	AR	20.8	MO	25.8	ND	32.6
TX	11.4	MS	21.8	MT	26.2	WI	32.8
AZ	11.6	VA	22.4	NJ	27.6	PA	33.6
NV	14.4	TN	22.6	IN	27.8	MI	34.2
DE	14.8	AL	24.4	WV	29.2	OH	34.8
NC	15.0	ID	24.4	NE	29.6	RI	35.2
SC	15.0	OR	24.4	WY	29.6	NH	35.6
GA	15.2	UT	24.4	MD	30.2	MA	36.2
LA	16.4	KY	24.8	NY	30.6	MN	36.2
OK	16.6	WA	24.8	ME	31.4	IA	36.8
CA	18.4	SD	25.0	KS	31.8	VT	37.6
HI	18.4					CT	37.8

*numbers are rounded

Challenges Gauge Rankings

To gauge the urgency of cumulative effects over rural education from the above-discussed challenges, we average each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each. The results are presented in Table 4.

In terms of regional patterns, the data here suggest that the influence of these challenges is concentrated in a handful of regions.

Five of the 13 Urgent states are located in the Southeast (Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana) and six more are located in the West and Southwest (New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Nevada, California, and Hawaii). The two other Urgent states are located on the East Coast (Delaware) and in the Great Plains (Oklahoma).

States with a Critical ranking (2nd quartile) include six from the South/Southeast region (Arkansas, Mississippi, Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Kentucky), five from the West/Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Utah, and Washington), and one from the Northern Plains (South Dakota).

In the category of Serious-ranked states (3rd quartile), we find four states from the Great Plains (Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, and Wyoming), two from the Midwest (Missouri and Indiana) and three from the East Coast (New Jersey, Maryland, and New York). Colorado, West Virginia, and Maine round out the Serious Quartile.

States scoring lowest on the Challenges Gauge are, by and large, located in New England and in the Great Lakes/Mid-West Region.

No state ranks in the highest quartile on all five indicators, and only two (New Mexico and Arizona) rank Urgent in four. Three others (Delaware, South Carolina, and Hawaii) rank in the Urgent category on three of five indicators

The indicator that most frequently contributes to a high cumulative ranking is the percentage of minority students in rural schools, with household mobility a close second. The indicator that contributes least to a high cumulative ranking is the percentage of rural students receiving special education services.

Policy Outcomes Gauge Indicators

It is fairly common in education research and writing for the term "outputs" to be defined rather narrowly in terms of measurable student outcomes (e.g., test scores) while variables representing the quality and quantity of resources consumed by schools—fiscal, human, and otherwise—are construed as "inputs."

But in this report, our concern is educational policy and how it can influence rural schooling. Given this concern, it makes sense for us to blend educational inputs and outputs, construing them as the direct and indirect outcomes of state policy decisions (e.g., state policy decisions dictate the size of schools and school districts, and the size of schools and school districts influences graduation rates). In other words, our policy outcomes include both student outcomes and the structural factors that influence them and are within the control of policymakers.

Here, we define each of the indicators in the Policy Outcomes Gauge, and summarize state and regional patterns discernible in the data. For each indicator, the more undesirable the outcome, the more attention policymakers should give to the indicator, and therefore, the higher the ranking.

- *General fund revenue gap* is the range, expressed in dollars, between the 80th percentile and the 20th percentile of per pupil state and local resources in rural school districts (the top and bottom 20% are excluded in order to eliminate exceptional cases, or "outliers"). The larger the range, the less equitable the distribution, and the higher the state ranking on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

The figures we report here illustrate the gap in general fund revenues that rural school districts are given to provide educational services. Oregon exhibits the widest range in per pupil state and local revenue at nearly $7,400 per pupil. Four others (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Montana) have ranges of more than $5,000. In general, the lowest ranges are in the Southeast and Appalachia (no state from either region is in the top half of the ranking). The largest ranges are in the West, Southwest, and Northeast. The Great Plains states are notably spread across the quartiles.

- *Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction* is the total dollar amount spent on instruction (teacher salaries, instructional supplies, etc.) in rural schools, divided by the total enrollment in rural schools. The lower the per pupil expenditures, the greater the concern and the higher the state scores on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

The dollar amounts for this indicator allow us to see the variation among states on the amount of money, per student, that goes toward teaching and learning in rural schools.

The range is quite large, from a low of just over $3,000 per pupil in Mississippi to a high of over $6,600 in New York and Alaska. In addition to Mississippi, other Southern states ranking highest on this indicator include Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida, and Alabama, all of which spend less than $3,600 per pupil on instruction in rural schools. They are joined in the top quartile by Ohio, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kansas, Idaho, Missouri, and Utah. Ohio, at $3,439, spends less per pupil on instruction in rural schools than every other state except Mississippi. A number of the states ranking highest on this indicator (e.g., Mississippi and Oklahoma) also rank highest in terms of poverty and/or challenges; thus, it appears that the distribution of resources may be exacerbating challenges by providing insufficient funding levels.

[In some states] it appears that the distribution of resources may be exacerbating challenges by providing insufficient funding levels.

In many respects, state rankings on this indicator provide a mirror image of the previous indicator. States that score high on inequity in resources tend to score low on per pupil expenditures in rural areas. In fact, nine of the top 10 on this gauge (states spending the least on rural instruction) are states with the most equity. In other words, every rural school in these states is treated with pretty much the same fiscal restraint. Arizona is the exception. It is among the top 10 low-level spenders on

instruction, and also among the 10 most inequitable funders.

By contrast, nine of the 10 that spend the most on instruction are among the one-half of states with the greatest inequity in spending. Some schools spend a lot within these states, others not nearly so much. Many of these are predominantly Northeastern urban states (New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Delaware) and the rest are widely scattered (Alaska, Wyoming, Maine, and Wisconsin).

- *The percentage of total current expenditures spent on pupil transportation* is the total spent on vehicle operation, monitoring riders, and servicing and maintenance, expressed as a percentage of the total current expenditures in rural districts. The higher the percentage of expenditures for transportation, the higher a state ranks on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

Variations in the amount of money spent on pupil transportation are related to unavoidable issues associated with terrain and geography, but also to policy decisions.

Variations in the amount of money spent on pupil transportation (and, therefore, not spent on teaching and learning) are related to unavoidable issues associated with terrain and geography, but also to policies on school and district size, personnel decisions, and the permissible length of bus rides for students. The national average is 4.3% of total current expenditures, while state figures range from 6.6% (West Virginia) to 2.4% (Alaska). Comparisons of states that contend with similar terrain and geography suggest that policy decisions play a substantial role in state-to-state variations: Nebraska spends 3.1% on transportation, while similarly situated Kansas spends 4.7%; North Dakota spends 5.9%, while South Dakota spends 3.6%; New Mexico spends 5.7%, while Texas spends 2.7%.

It is very difficult to detect regional, geographic, or topographical patterns in this variable. Among the top 10 on this indicator are such diverse states as West Virginia, Louisiana, North Dakota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. By contrast, among the bottom 10 are Tennessee, Nebraska, California, and Alaska.

- *Rural student-teacher ratio* is the ratio of students to teachers in regular public and secondary schools designated as rural by NCES. The ratio is student-weighted (i.e., it is not an average of the student-teacher ratios reported for schools or districts, but represents the ratio between the total number of rural students and the total number of rural teachers). The higher the student-teacher ratio, the higher a state ranks on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

Student-teacher ratio is a commonly used measure of class size, an educational variable that is often linked to student achievement levels. The figures here range from one teacher for every 11.4 students (in sparsely populated Wyoming) to one teacher for every 20.3 students (in densely populated California). The 11 lowest ranking states all have ratios of less than 13 to 1. Of the 11, six are Plains states (Wyoming, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, and Iowa) and four are New England states (Vermont, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut). The nine highest ranking states all have ratios of at least 17 to 1, and offer a mixed bag geographically: West (California, Utah, Nevada), Northwest (Oregon, Washington), Great Lakes (Michigan, Indiana), and Southeast/Mid-Atlantic (Florida, Maryland).

- *Median organizational scale* is a measure of the combined effects of school size and district size and is the median computed for all rural districts in each state. It is calculated by multiplying school enrollment by district enrollment; the result is divided by 100 for simplification. The larger the organizational scale, the higher the state ranks on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

Operating both separately and in combination with each other, school size and district size are variables that influence schooling operations and outcomes. Specifically, larger size has been associated with lower graduation rates, lower achievement levels, and larger achievement gaps between wealthier versus poorer students. Our intent with this indicator is to capture the general scale of operations for rural schooling in each state. The range is extremely wide: North Carolina, the highest ranking state, has a median organizational scale that is nearly 400 times larger than the lowest ranking state, Montana. Of the 13 highest ranking states, only one (Rhode Island) is not located in or contiguous to the Southeast Region. The states with the highest rankings are: North Carolina, Florida, Maryland, Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama,

Delaware, Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee, West Virginia, Rhode Island, and Mississippi. These are mostly states with large, often countywide school districts. The lowest ranking states are mostly in the Great Plains and the West, and all are states with independent school districts.

- *Rural four-year graduation rate* is the number of students graduating from rural school districts at the completion of the 2001-2002 academic year, expressed as a percentage of the district's 9th grade enrollment for the school year 1998-1999. The lower the rural four-year graduation rate, the higher the state ranks on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

How best to calculate graduation rates is a subject of much debate in research circles. There are many approaches, none of which are considered definitive. The approach we chose involves dividing the number of graduates in any given year by the number of potential graduates in the 9th grade class of four years earlier. The approach does not attempt to account for in- and out-migration, and so there is the potential for bias against states with declining enrollments (although most states with the highest graduation rates in this analysis are Plains states, where the issue of declining enrollments is most acute). The range here is wide, from just under 50% of South Carolina's rural students graduating in four years to just over 90% of Nebraska's. Along with Nebraska, other Plains and Midwest states with high graduation rates are Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota—all at 85% or better. Joining South Carolina in having the lowest graduation rates are seven other Southeastern states (Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi), two Southwestern states (Arizona and New Mexico), and Western states California and Alaska. These states all have rural four-year graduation rates below 64%. There is a strong relationship between state rankings on the Challenges Gauge and rural graduation rates, and a weaker relationship (about half as strong) between Poverty Gauge rankings and graduation rates.

- *The Rural NAEP math and reading score for grades 4 and 8* is the average of four scores (mean math and reading scores for rural students in grades 4 and 8) on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, as reported by NCES. The lower the NAEP score, the higher the state ranks on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

The NAEP offers assessment data for state-by-state comparisons. The disaggregation of the assessment data by locale allows us to compare rural performance from state-to-state. With ever-increasing pressure on states, districts, and schools to demonstrate improvement via achievement gains, understanding the status of rural academic achievement as measured by this indicator is crucial for policymakers. States with the lowest rural NAEP scores are located primarily in the Southwest, West, and Southeast (in order, New Mexico, Mississippi, Alabama, Hawaii, Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, California, and Nevada). States with the highest rural NAEP scores are primarily in the Northeast, followed by the Great Plains and the Great Lakes regions. There is a strong relationship between NAEP scores and Poverty Gauge rankings (states with higher poverty have lower scores), and an even stronger relationship between NAEP scores and Challenges Gauge rankings (states with greater challenges have lower scores).

Policy Outcomes Gauge Rankings

To gauge the importance of addressing the policy outcomes of rural education in each state, we average each state's ranking on the seven indicators, giving equal weight to each. The results are presented in Table 5.

In terms of regional patterns, the data here suggest that the highest concentrations of undesirable policy outcomes exist in only a few regions.

Nine of the 13 Crucial states are located east of the Mississippi, mostly in the Southeast (Louisiana, Florida, Delaware, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky, South Carolina, and Tennessee). The other four are located on the West Coast (Oregon) and in the Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah). Hawaii ranks number one on the basis of three indicators for which data was available, but the lack of available data for calculating the other three indicators led us to exclude the state from rankings on the Policy Outcomes Gauge.

States with a Very Important ranking (2nd quartile) are again primarily located east of the Mississippi in a nearly contiguous block of states running from Pennsylvania to Arkansas (in order, Ohio, North Carolina, Maryland, West Virginia, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and Virginia). Others in this quartile are California, Washington, Nevada, and Idaho.

In the category of Important-ranked states (3rd quartile), we find four Northeastern states (Rhode Island, Maine, New York, and New Hampshire), and three Great Lakes Region states (Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota), along with Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and North Dakota.

States scoring lowest on the Policy Outcomes Gauge are, by and large, located in the Great Plains. Additional lowest-scoring states are in New England.

No state ranks in the highest quartile on all seven indicators, and only three (Louisiana, Arizona, and Mississippi) rank Crucial in as many as five. Four others (Oregon, Florida, Alabama, and New Mexico) rank in the Crucial category on four of seven indicators.

The indicator that most frequently contributes to a high cumulative ranking is the four-year graduation rate in rural schools, with rural NAEP scores running a close second. The indicator that contributes least to a high cumulative ranking is the general fund revenue gap.

The Rural Education Priority Gauge

Finally, we average the cumulative rankings on the four gauges (Importance, Poverty, Challenges, and Policy Outcomes) to prioritize states according to the overall status of rural education in that state. The four gauges are each weighted equally. Therefore, the seven indicators comprising the Policy Outcomes Gauge each receive slightly less relative weight than the indicators comprising each of the other gauges (because there are more of them to share the same weight as the gauges with fewer indicators). The rankings for the Rural Education Priority Gauge are presented in Table 6.

The top quartile on this gauge includes states in quintessentially rural regions of the country: the Mid-South Delta (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas), the Southeast (South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia), the Southwest (New Mexico and Arizona), and Central Appalachia (Kentucky and West Virginia). Oklahoma is also included in this quartile.

No state scores in the highest quartile on all four gauges, but six of the top 12 score in the highest quartile on three of the gauges (New Mexico, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Arizona, and Oklahoma).

Five of the states in the top quartile on the Rural Education Priority Gauge are also ranked in the top quartile on the Importance Gauge (Mississippi, Kentucky, West Virginia, Oklahoma, and North Carolina). Of the remaining seven highest priority states, three are in the 2nd quartile (Alabama, Arkansas, and South Carolina). Three others are in the 3rd quartile (New Mexico, Louisiana, and Georgia) and one falls in the 4th quartile (Arizona).

All but three of the 12 highest priority states also ranked in the top quartile on the Poverty Gauge. The three states that did not (South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia) were each ranked in the second highest poverty quartile.

Seven of the states with the highest challenges are also ranked Leading (top quartile) on the Rural Education Priority Gauge (New Mexico, Louisiana, Arizona, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Georgia, and North Carolina). All others are in the 2nd quartile

Table 5. Policy Outcomes Gauge Cumulative Rankings*

Given the outcomes of policy and practice in rural schools, how important is it in each state that policymakers explicitly address the particular needs of schools serving its rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on seven indicators. The lower the number, the more important it is for policymakers to address rural school issues in that state.

Crucial		Very Important		Important		Notable	
LA	13.0	CA	20.9	MO	25.7	AK	29.5
AZ	13.3	WA	21.1	MI	26.0	NV	29.7
FL	13.9	OH	21.3	OK	26.7	CO	30.9
AL	14.7	NV	21.4	IL	26.7	KS	30.9
MS	15.9	NC	21.4	TX	28.1	MT	30.9
NM	16.1	MD	22.0	NY	28.4	MA	31.9
OR	17.9	ID	22.1	ME	29.1	CT	32.7
GA	19.0	WV	22.4	RI	29.3	WI	34.0
KY	19.3	IN	24.0	ND	29.4	WY	34.0
DE	19.3	PA	24.6	MN	29.4	IA	36.3
UT	19.4	AR	25.3	NH	29.4	NE	38.4
SC	20.1	VA	25.3			SD	38.7
TN	20.1					VT	40.2

*numbers are rounded

on the Challenges Gauge, with one exception (West Virginia ranked in the 3rd quartile).

Eight Leading states on the Rural Education Priority Gauge are also ranked in the top quartile on the Policy Outcomes Gauge (New Mexico, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Alabama, Arizona, South Carolina, and Georgia).

Five states in the Major quartile ranked in the highest quartile on two of the four underlying gauges (Florida, South Dakota, North Dakota, Hawaii, and Delaware). Four other states rated as Major had a ranking in the highest quartile on one of the four underlying gauges.

Table 6. Rural Education Priority Gauge

The combined average ranking of each state on the four gauges (Importance, Poverty, Challenges, and Policy Outcomes).

Leading		Major		Significant		Notable	
MS	8.0	FL	17.3	ME	23.8	MD	34.5
NM	10.3	TN	17.3	VA	24.3	NY	34.8
KY	10.8	ID	19.5	CA	24.5	MI	34.8
LA	11.0	TX	20.3	NV	25.3	VT	34.8
AL	11.3	SD	20.8	WA	25.8	NH	35.0
OK	14.0	MO	21.0	IN	26.3	IL	35.5
AR	14.8	OR	21.0	KS	28.8	MN	35.5
SC	14.8	MT	21.3	NE	29.5	CO	36.5
AZ	15.3	ND	22.3	OH	29.5	WI	37.0
NC	15.3	AK	22.8	WY	30.5	NJ	40.5
WV	15.5	HI	23.0	PA	32.5	RI	43.3
GA	15.8	DE	23.3	IA	33.3	CT	46.0
		UT	23.5			MA	46.8

*numbers are rounded

The lowest ranking states on the Rural Education Priority Gauge are mostly urban states on the East Coast and in the Great Lakes Region. Of those ranking lowest overall, two (Vermont and Iowa) are ranked near the top on Importance. Relatively low levels of poverty and other challenges, along with solid policy outcomes, prevent them from ranking higher in terms of priority.

Discussion

A few caveats presented in the *Why Rural Matters 2003* report bear repeating here.

First, the quartile categories we use to describe states' position on the continuum from 1-50 are arbitrary, and are used merely as a convenient way to group states into smaller units in order to discuss patterns in the findings. There is, then, very little substantive difference between the "Urgent" poverty label attached to Idaho at the 13th poorest in the U.S. and the "Critical" label attached to Montana at number 14.

Second, the use of regional terms in this report, as in the last, is quite loose. As stated in the previous report, "the nuanced cultural patterns of rural America caution against rigid division of states into regions." The caution still holds true, and we adhere to it. Thus, states may be described in different parts of the text as belonging to each of several different regions. The intent is not to confuse or obscure, but to best characterize the context in which we are discussing specific relationships between individual states and varying geographic and cultural regions of the U.S. Oklahoma may be in the Southern Plains when it is part of a pattern that attaches to Kansas and Colorado, but part of the Southwest when it is part of a pattern that attaches to New Mexico and Texas.

Third, that some states are identified here as being the highest priority states should not be interpreted to suggest that rural education in other states does not deserve attention from policymakers. No state ranks in the least important/least urgent quartile on every indicator. Indeed, every state has at least one indicator on which it is ranked above the national median. So clearly every state faces challenges in ensuring that all rural students receive a high quality education. The highest priority states are identified as such because they represent places where a convergence of contexts, conditions, and forces suggest the most extreme need for the attention of policymakers.

New Indicators

Less than one-third of the indicators used in this report were used in the previous report. This is partly because there is nothing new to report on indicators based on information taken from the decennial Census. But it is also because we want to look at rural education through many lenses in order to present a fuller portrait of its complexity.

Of the 15 new indicators included in this report, six offer different approaches to measuring what are essentially the same factors measured by other indicators in the previous reports. There are, for example, two new "poverty" gauge indicators (percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children who are living below the federal poverty line and rural per pupil property wealth) to help present a fuller and more fine-grained characterization of rural poverty in each state.

Seven new indicators in the Challenges and Policy Outcomes gauges present information on rural education issues not addressed in previous reports. Of these, three new Challenges indicators (percentage of the population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well," percentage of rural students who receive special education services, and percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma) allow us to better understand the extent of the need for additional resources and policy attention. Four new Policy Outcomes indicators (general fund revenue gap, median organizational scale, rural four-year graduation rate, and rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8) help us to characterize the ways in which policy decisions impact the schooling environment.

The states identified as highest priority face more substantial challenges, do so with fewer available resources, and achieve less in terms of student outcomes.

One new indicator represents a more substantive change leading to more significant differences in rankings. In this report, we use "mobility" as a measure of instability in rural communities; in the earlier report, we used "declining enrollment." Mobility measures the percentage of children who have changed residences, either moving into the district or moving from one location to another within the same community; declining enrollment measures the children who have left the community for another. The former measures social stress, and the latter measures economic distress. The net effect of this change is that the Southwest gains in priority and the Great Plains loses.

And that change in relative status underscores something important about interpreting these results. The fact that the Great Plains ranks lower in mobility than the Southwest and higher in declining enrollment does not mean that states in both regions are not experiencing more mobility and more enrollment decline. If we measured the change in the rate of mobility and the change in the rate of enrollment decline, states in both these regions might top the charts. These indicators measure a state's relative position on a variable at a point in time. They do not rank absolute changes over time.

Top Ranking States

The top ranking states on our Rural Education Priority Gauge are located in several prototypical rural regions: the Southwest, the Mid-South Delta, the Southeast, and Central Appalachia. But despite cultural and socio-economic differences in these regions, these high priority rural education states exhibit a fairly common pattern in the educational indicators that earn them their high ranking.

In a nutshell, the states identified as highest priority in this report face more substantial challenges, do so with fewer available resources, and achieve less in terms of student outcomes.

Of the 22 indicators used in this report, the indicators that most frequently contribute to a highest priority state ranking are the five poverty indicators, the percentage of minority students, educational attainment rates among adults, mobility, per pupil instructional expenditures, student-teacher ratios, four-year graduation rates, and NAEP scores. To put this into perspective, we compare some characteristics of the 13 highest priority states with the characteristics of all other states and also with the characteristics of the 13 lowest priority states (see Table 7).

New High-Ranking States

There are four Leading states in the Priority Gauge that were not there in previous reports, but all four are states

Table 7. Highest Priority States Compared with All Other States and with Lowest Priority States*

Indicator	12 Highest Priority States	All Other States	13 Lowest Priority States
Percentage of rural students eligible for subsidized meals	53.2%	31.6%	22.7%
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	30.8%	15.0%	8.4%
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,742	$4,358	$4,617
Rural four-year graduation rate	63.7%	74.1%	83.2%

*numbers are rounded

that ranked in the second highest quartile on the *Why Rural Matters 2003* report. Three of those four are in the Southern Plains (Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma) and one is in the Southeast (Georgia).

These four states have much in common. Three of the four rank near the top on poverty and policy outcomes, and all four states rank near the top on other challenges. The higher prioritization of these states in this report is clearly related to the increased weight of social and economic conditions that influence schooling, as well as the addition of policy outcome measures. New Mexico is a prime example. Ranked 16th in the earlier report, it ranks as the second highest rural education priority state in the U.S. on the basis of indicators used in this report. While it ranks 33rd in the nation in terms of rural importance, New Mexico ranks 1st on poverty, 1st on challenges, and 7th on policy outcomes.

With one exception, the new high-ranking states are not predominantly rural (Oklahoma is the only one to rank in the top quartile on the Importance Gauge), but their rural schools and districts face tremendous obstacles to providing quality educational opportunities for all children.

In fact, many of the states that exhibit the greatest needs in this report (i.e., in terms of poverty, challenges, and policy outcomes) are not states that are generally thought of as rural. Take Florida, for example. The schools that serve its 280,000 plus rural student population face the second toughest challenges in the nation and produce the 4th lowest policy outcomes. Given the fact that these 280,000 students represent less than 12% of the state's total student population, these students and their schools and communities are not likely to find themselves at the center of the educational policy discourse in Florida. Rural children, schools, and communities in non-rural states are all too likely to be overlooked.

Regional Patterns

Regional patterns evident in the results presented here suggest the Mid-South Delta (Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas), the Southwest (New Mexico and Arizona), Appalachia (Kentucky and West Virginia), and the coastal Southeast (South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia) as areas of greatest priority for policymakers. All of these were priority regions in the previous report, except the Southwest.

Two regions with states that ranked in the Leading category in previous reports but not in this report are Northern New England and, especially, the Northern Plains. Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Maine, and Vermont receive lower priority rankings in this report because of the lesser weight given indicators measuring how "rural" the states are and the greater weight given indicators measuring the conditions under which rural schools and district operate. Consider Nebraska: a predominantly rural state facing poverty levels above the national median and a state funding system that creates huge revenue gaps among rural districts, the state would rank much higher in terms of priority if its rural schools were not racking up 90% graduation rates.

The Gap between Challenges and Performance

To better illustrate the phenomenon of desirable policy outcomes counterbalancing poverty and challenges, we calculated the "gap" between a state's ranking on the Policy Outcomes Gauge and its ranking on each of the two urgency gauges (poverty and challenges). A state

that is achieving outcomes consistent with its poverty and challenges would get a gap score of zero. If it has a positive gap, its performance ranks worse than its poverty or challenges ranking would indicate it should, compared to other states. If it has a negative gap, it is performing better than its poverty or challenges ranking would indicate (see Tables 8 and 9).

The worst performance relative to challenges and poverty come from rural schools in states that have large urban populations. Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island score in the top quartile on both the Poverty Gap and the Challenges Gap due to relatively weak outcomes, despite comparatively low poverty and mild challenges.

By contrast, the states where rural schools and their students tended to do well despite strong challenges and high poverty are predominantly rural states, especially those with small independent rural school districts. Among those scoring in the lowest quartile on both of the gaps are a band of Great Plains states including Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.

The only other state to score in the lowest quartile on both gap measures is Arkansas—not a Plains state, but contiguous to the Plains—and a state with high poverty and challenges, but an independent community school system.

There are no states in this "overachieving" group that have centralized governance systems.

Importantly, there are no states in this "overachieving" group that have centralized governance systems. In fact, the policy outcome indicator most closely related to Poverty Gap rankings was median organizational scale. The policy outcome indicator most closely related to Challenge Gap rankings was percentage of total current expenditures on pupil transportation. Both of these indicators are most likely proxies for independent community school districts.

Killing the Goose That Lays the Golden Egg

Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming are all states with low "gap" scores in Tables 8 and 9. The rural schools in these states are doing well (in terms of policy outcomes) relative to poverty levels and other challenges they face. It is no coincidence that rural education in these states is characterized by smaller organizational scale (lower student-teacher ratio, smaller schools, and smaller districts), a characteristic that research suggests is a contributor to positive outcomes like higher graduation rates. These four states have graduation rates among the nation's highest. Because their rural schools and students do well, none of these heavily rural states is identified as a Leading priority state in this report.

At first glance, it would appear that rural schools and districts in these states are less "at-risk" than those in other states. It is actually quite the opposite. The smaller schools and districts in these states (and others) are often at political risk of consolidation or fiscal asphyxiation. There is a constant rant against their lack of scale. They do exceptional work with limited resources and—in many cases—less than supportive policy environments.

Table 8. Poverty Gap

The difference obtained from subtracting the state's ranking on the Policy Outcomes Gauge from its ranking on the poverty gauge. The higher the number, the worse a state is doing relative to poverty; the lower the number, the better a state is doing relative to poverty.

Leading		Major		Significant		Notable	
DE	30	IL	12	AL	5	MO	-11
MD	27	GA	12	SC	5	VT	-11
OH	21	NH	11	CO	5	KS	-11
IN	20	NJ	10	NY	4	IA	-14
FL	20	NC	10	LA	2	TX	-14
OR	17	AZ	9	MN	0	AK	-15
WA	15	VA	9	WI	-1	WV	-16
CA	15	VT	7	MS	-2	AR	-17
MI	14	CT	7	NM	-5	OK	-22
RI	14	TN	7	ME	-6	WY	-23
NV	14	MA	7	KY	-7	NE	-23
PA	13			ID	-7	ND	-24
						MT	-25
						SD	-40

Note: Hawaii is excluded due to missing data

Table 9. Challenges Gap

The difference between each state's ranking on the Policy Outcomes Gauge and its ranking on the Challenges Gauge. The higher the number, the worse a state is doing relative to challenges; the lower the number, the better a state is doing relative to challenges.

Leading		Major		Significant		Notable	
OH	27	LA	9	MO	1	AR	-9
PA	18	UT	8	GA	1	NJ	-9
AL	15	WA	8	VT	0	NC	-10
MI	15	IN	8	ID	-1	MT	-11
MD	15	CT	7	FL	-1	WY	-12
KY	14	TN	6	KS	-2	NV	-12
MN	12	ND	5	CA	-2	CO	-13
OR	12	ME	4	DE	-3	NE	-15
MS	11	NY	4	WI	-4	OK	-17
NH	11	MA	4	NM	-5	SD	-23
RI	11	IA	2	SC	-5	AK	-23
WV	10	AZ	2	VA	-7	TX	-27
IL	10						

Policy decisions that undermine these rural schools would clearly be a case of killing the goose that lays the golden egg.

Ignoring Country Cousins

Four contiguous northeastern states with large rural populations that are demographically overwhelmed by much larger urban populations (Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio—all with less than one-fourth of their students in rural schools) stand out at the top on both the Poverty Gap and the Challenges Gap. Rural student achievement in these states is not absolutely poor, but it is not strong given the relatively low barriers to achievement they face. None of these four states ranks higher than 34th on either the Poverty or the Challenges Gauge (they average only 37th most urgent), yet all of them produce achievement outcomes that are mediocre to poor (average is 21st worst outcomes). In each case, their rank on NAEP scores is worse than their rank on the Poverty Gauge, and in all but one case (Maryland) their rank on the NAEP scores is worse than their rank on the Challenges Gauge. For all four, their graduation rate ranking is substantially worse than either their poverty or other challenges ranking.

This relatively low student achievement may be related to a consistent pattern of poor policy outcomes in these states. Rural schools and districts in all four of these large, mostly urban states, rank above the median among states for organizational scale (large schools in large districts) and class size (student-teacher ratio). Maryland and Pennsylvania also rank high in the percentage of school expenditures on transportation and Ohio ranks second lowest in rural per pupil expenditures for instruction. It appears that these states have adopted an urban large-school model in rural areas that is producing mediocrity in outcomes for students in a position to do better. Although these are demographically "urban" states, they are home to 1,279,338 students who attend rural schools (nearly 15% of all rural students in the U.S.) and who are doing less well than expected.

Issues for Consideration

Policymakers should turn their attention to the realities of rural education as it exists in their state. When they do, they will find that rural schools and communities have strengths on which to build as well as weaknesses that must be addressed. Many of the appropriate policy responses will be of value to non-rural communities as well, aiming for high quality educational opportunities for all children in their state.

Policymakers will find that rural schools and communities have strengths on which to build as well as weaknesses that must be addressed.

This report provides policymakers and advocates with an opportunity to see rural education in their state, both as it is and as it compares to rural education in other states. It is very clear that each state faces its own unique facts and circumstances with respect to the challenges and opportunities in rural education.

It is also clear that there are certain patterns in the data in this report and from other research that suggest com-

mon issues we believe are most worthy of consideration by policymakers. Without presenting a comprehensive set of policy recommendations, we offer some food for thought about these issues.

The Scale of Schooling

Rural schools and districts tend to be smaller than their urban and suburban counterparts, by greater or lesser measure, in all states. Sometimes this is of necessity, dictated by geographic and demographic features, sometimes it is by preferences rooted in strong school-community relationships, and sometimes it is a combination of the two. On the whole, a large body of research supports the conclusion that smaller schools and smaller districts are more effective, especially in addressing the educational needs of low-income communities.

Fiscal pressures, however, tempt policymakers to push for larger schools as cost-saving measures. They also say that they can accommodate more specialization in faculty, more non-instructional support services, and more depth in curriculum at a lower per pupil cost.

Consolidation of rural schools generally results in students having to travel long distances over unimproved roads to attend school. These long bus rides create a unique educational disadvantage imposed on rural students because they rob children of time to rest, study, and play. Student participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities (activities that positively influence student academic outcomes) decline as a result of these transportation burdens.

Ironically, as evidence mounts that larger schools in urban and suburban areas are increasingly ineffective and even dysfunctional, educators and policymakers have turned to fabricating small learning communities while maintaining the advantages of large scale in administration, facilities, and curriculum.

The rural policy challenge is to find ways to fabricate the advantages of larger scale schooling without losing the intimacy, accountability, and engagement that are the blessing of smaller schools. Among the measures that are gaining appeal are multi-age classrooms, wider grade-span configurations (especially K-8), use of distance learning to pool both student and faculty resources among clusters of small schools, using school facilities in multiple ways (e.g., town library, community center, meeting space), and team teaching.

Policymakers should also provide an adjustment in the state aid formula for the higher costs of operating smaller schools in high-poverty communities, without limiting such adjustment to "necessarily" small schools or to rural areas. Smallness should be recognized for what it is—a cost-effective educational strategy, especially in low-income communities.

Policymakers cannot invent too many ways to preserve the principal asset of rural education: smaller schools.

Reorganization Standards

Notwithstanding the desirability and wisdom of maintaining small schools, states may have many legitimate reasons for reorganizing schools and districts. When they do, reorganization plans should result in an organizational structure that is accountable to standards that have the interests of children and communities in mind. Here are some reorganization goals to consider:

1. Maintain and improve small schools, making them more cost-effective.
2. Provide sufficient funding for each school to meet program and outcome standards as defined by the state and to provide each child with an equal opportunity to achieve.
3. Retain or place schools within communities and avoid placing them in isolated open country.
4. Provide for maximum participation in school governance by communities served by the school and the school district, and require local community approval of permanent school closings and other reorganization decisions.
5. Honor and reinforce a policy of racial desegregation.
6. Make best use of appropriate distance learning technologies to share students and faculty, enriching curriculum and instruction without enlarging schools or transporting students.
7. Reduce disparity between districts in local tax capacity and effort.
8. Protect children from bus rides exceeding 30 minutes each way for elementary students and one hour each way for high school students.
9. Maximize regional cooperation between districts, such as regional education service centers, to provide high-cost, low-demand services efficiently to schools and/or students who require them.

10. Strengthen local economic and community development and support community patterns of work and commerce.

Poverty

Poverty is the strongest and most persistent threat to high student achievement, and the data in this report indicate that poverty levels in rural communities are very high in many states. Other research indicates that rural poverty levels generally exceed that in urban and suburban areas. Compounding the challenges associated with serving impoverished student populations, rural schools have fewer resources—largely as a result of diminished local property tax bases and inequitable distributions of state funds.

Compounding the challenges associated with serving impoverished student populations, rural schools have fewer resources.

Apart from maintaining small schools, states should adjust their state aid based on poverty levels in a district. Poverty is a real cost-increasing factor in schooling, and most states acknowledge it in their finance formula.

Some states work a poverty factor into their basic aid formula, others have separate ("categorical") programs for poverty aid, and yet others use both approaches. Most try to target poverty aid to districts with higher poverty rates. But in nearly all cases, the amount of additional aid for each poor child is well below the level needed to compensate for the challenges of providing a quality education to these children, who usually start behind and stay behind.

Weighting poverty in the school funding formula is important in every demographic region, but it is most important where the level of poverty is highest. The cost associated with teaching low-income children almost certainly rises disproportionately as the poverty rate increases. Some states acknowledge this, but most do not. In the highest poverty areas—rural and urban—the need is greatest.

Growing Diversity in Rural Areas

Rural America is growing increasingly diverse, creating unique challenges in meeting the needs of all students. Rapid growth in ELL student populations and lack of access to appropriate training programs for teachers have left many rural schools and districts without qualified staff.

As with poverty, some states work an ELL factor into their basic aid formula and/or have separate categorical programs to target aid to schools serving English Language Learners. Here too, in nearly all cases, the amount of additional aid for each ELL child is well below the level needed to compensate for the challenges of providing a quality education to these children who usually start behind and too often stay behind.

Providing additional funds to schools and districts with ELL students is important, but it is not enough. Teachers need specific training if they are to provide ELL students with a high quality education. Such training is most often provided by college or university faculty. In isolated rural areas without immediate access to higher education institutions, traditional coursework or professional development seminars may not be a viable option. In such cases, higher education and K-12 communities must work together to make use of distance learning, on-site college courses, and other non-traditional approaches to instructional delivery.

Outmigration and Population Decline

Many rural communities are rapidly losing population. This diminishes the local property tax base while draining the community of the young talent it needs to survive and prosper. The loss of population—and with it, local amenities—makes it more difficult to recruit and retain quality teachers.

Too often, a sense of fatalism is associated with these communities. But places are usually not in a permanent state of decline. Equilibrium is almost always achieved, and often a reversal of fortunes occurs. Decline is a condition, not a fate.

Moreover, those who are "left behind" in such places have the same rights to an equal educational opportunity as those who leave. Society's obligation to educate is not dependent on demographic good fortune, and a child's right to an education should not be compromised by geography or be dependent on their parents' mobility.

This is especially true because those left behind are often the poorest, the least well-educated, the least mobile, and the most at-risk of educational failure. It is precisely these people who need forceful policies supporting public education. "No child left behind" must also mean "no place left behind."

When policymakers decide to disinvest in rural education in declining regions, they are in effect compromising the right of the children in those regions to an education.

If policymakers choose to arrest and reverse decline, schools have a potentially powerful role to play in the affirmative. They not only sharpen the skills of the local labor force, but they can directly engage students of all ages in academic work that supports development. Smart growth needs smart schools.

Declining enrollment is not a uniquely rural phenomenon. Most central cities east of the Mississippi and north of the Sun Belt are declining in population. A policy toward declining enrollment is needed for both urban and rural places.

We recommend some standards to apply to such a policy:

1. States should aim to maintain close school-community relationships, adult participation in schools, local responsibility for school governance, and strong civic engagement in schools.
2. Distance learning should be used to overcome cost barriers to a rich and challenging curriculum, and should do so in a way that makes maximum use of shared resources among declining communities in a region. Technology should not be used to centralize and standardize curriculum, or to reduce interaction between and among students and teachers.
3. Make best use of current facilities, encourage maintenance and repair, salvage the value in other local buildings, incorporate multiple community uses into schools with excess capacity, encourage and plan for multiple uses in new buildings, and encourage integrated financing across various program and agency lines.
4. School aid formulas should recognize the value of small schools and that value should be reflected in ways that mitigate the loss of aid due to declining enrollment.
5. States should devise mechanisms for sharing administrative costs without diminishing local governance, enlarging districts, or closing schools in order to achieve administrative efficiency.
6. States should not allow local education agencies to transport children long distances to achieve economies of scale at the school level. Time limits should be placed on the length of rides children are forced to endure.

Facilities Use

Rural communities often lack dedicated facilities for providing much-needed services (e.g., adult education, on-site delivery of postsecondary courses, public Internet access). Public school facilities can play a vital community role in supplying non-school agencies and community groups with the space and technology they need to provide these and other services. Public school facilities can also act as an important conduit for delivering non-educational services to students and their families.

Kentucky's Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and Youth Service Centers (YSCs) are a prime example of this approach to service delivery. Family Resource Centers serve elementary schools and provide on-site locations for the distribution of school supplies, household goods, and clothing; Youth Service Centers serve secondary schools and provide, in addition to services like those offered by FRCs, job placement assistance and counseling services ranging from family issues to substance abuse. Both FRCs and YSCs act as liaisons with social service agencies.

When school facilities are viewed as community facilities intended for multiple uses by multiple constituent groups, the investment in constructing and maintaining high quality facilities is an investment that pays dividends for the entire community. Unfortunately, many rural communities have outdated and substandard school buildings and other facilities. In addition, many facilities lack the kinds of up-to-date technology that are needed to make the most of available opportunities for instructional and non-instructional use. Lack of local funds makes improvements and new construction difficult if not impossible, and state facilities policies can often result in enticements and coercion to consolidate schools and districts in rural parts of the state.

Policy with regard to school facilities should consider the following:

1. Multiple Uses: Construction of new facilities and renovation of existing structures should recognize the role of school buildings and other facilities as community centers, and opportunities for multiple uses by different constituent groups should be built into construction and renovation plans. Construction and renovation plans should include a technology component that addresses the immediate needs and leaves room for long-term growth related to school and community uses (e.g., distance learning).
2. Location: Construction of new facilities should recognize the role of school buildings and other facilities as centers of their community, and should locate new schools and other facilities on sites that are in or near traditional community centers. New facilities should never be constructed on sites that create long bus rides for children and make it cumbersome for parents and community members to visit and use the facility.
3. Equity-Based Funding: Capital construction and renovation funds should be distributed in a way that addresses inequities resulting from disparities in local property wealth (i.e., those who have less in local receipts should receive more from state sources). Procedures for evaluating the condition of existing structures and determining need should be clear and should allow for community insight and review/input.
4. School and District Size: Facilities policy should recognize the value of small schools and districts, should not set arbitrary minimum enrollment sizes, and must not serve as a shoehorn for school and district consolidation based on arbitrary economies of scale.

Sparseness and Isolation

Rural schools frequently are defined by their isolation, long distances between places, and their sparse populations. These characteristics affect the cost of transportation, access to goods and services, and the ability to recruit and retain quality teachers.

Policies with regard to sparseness and isolation should consider the following:

1. Transportation: State aid formulas should recognize the additional costs of providing pupil transportation services in isolated settings. Importantly, the delivery mechanism should include formula components that measure isolation (e.g., actual miles traveled per student, weighted for extraordinary terrain conditions).
2. Technology: Policies should support the innovative use of technology as an approach to minimizing challenges associated with isolation (e.g., distance learning as a way of broadening curricula, sharing teachers, students, and instructional resources, and creating opportunities for higher education and other non-K-12 education services).
3. Funding: In addition to funding that is directly tied to transportation and technology, the distribution of general funds for instruction and other school operations should recognize additional costs associated with sparseness and isolation. Goods and services cost more, and additional funds are needed to pay for them. Recruiting and retaining quality teachers requires approaches like signing bonuses, housing allowances, and tuition reimbursement/forgiveness. These too cost more, and necessitate providing sparse and/or isolated districts with additional funds.

Rural schools are often defined by their isolation and sparse populations. These characteristics affect the cost of transportation, access to goods and services, and the ability to recruit and retain quality teachers.

Technology and Distance Learning

In the above sections, we highlight the use of technology to draw on the strengths of rural schools and communities to address various needs and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and learning. Distance learning is one strategy that has proven to be effective in ensuring that schools and districts are able to provide rich curricula without restructuring and uprooting students and communities.

In light of this key role that can be played by technology, it is important to recognize that rural places often lack access to technological infrastructures that are available in suburban and urban settings. Rural students are less likely to have access to telephone service, a home computer, or the Internet. Many rural communities do not have high-speed Internet connections.

If rural schools and communities are to take advantage of the benefits offered by technology, they must have financial and policy assistance in developing and main-

taining the kind of infrastructure that will support the innovative use of technologies like distance learning. Technology funding, like facilities funding, should be equity-based, with monies targeted to the school districts demonstrating the greatest need. Moreover, in determining need, isolation and the lack of access to services like higher education institutions and research libraries should be included. In other words, the technology needs of a school that is 200 miles from the nearest community college and 35 miles from a library that contains a few hundred volumes are very different from a school that sits one-half mile from a regional university in a town with four branches of the public library. The cost of ensuring equality in technology resources among students at these two schools is not equal.

Conclusion

It should not be necessary to argue "why rural matters." But the truth is that rural schools and communities are increasingly invisible in a mass society that is fundamentally preoccupied with its urban identity, its urban problems, and its urban future. One does not have to go beyond images of rural life in the media to see that our society is confused and naïve about rural America and its institutions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the way our public policies relate, often as if by afterthought, to rural schools and communities. We hope that this report helps unveil the diverse and complex nature of rural education, as well as the disparities it often embodies, so that the needs of the nearly 9 million students who attend rural schools will not be lost in ignorance or indifference.

---

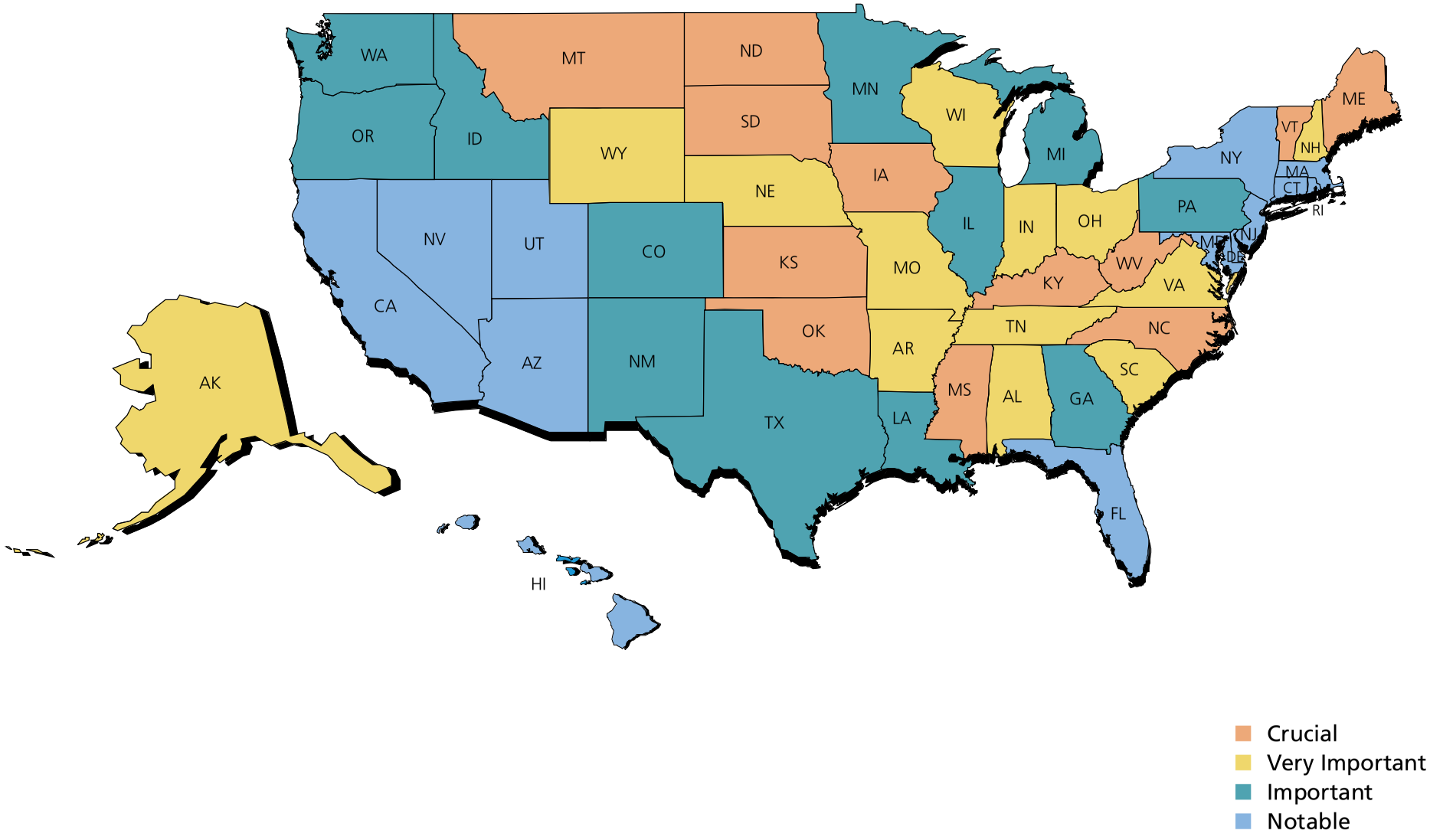
1 Sources:
National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data Public Elementary and Secondary School District Universe, 2002-2003 (preliminary).
National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data Public Elementary and Secondary School District Universe, 2000-2001.
National Center for Education Statistics/U.S. Census Bureau School District Tabulation (STP2) and School District Tabulation Supplement (STP2S).
U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF1)
U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 2 (SF2)
U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3)
U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF4)

Lack of data in these primary sources necessitated the use of data from individual state departments of education for the following: minority student enrollment, subsidized meal participation rate (TN), student-teacher ratio (MA, RI, TN). Other instances where no viable alternate data were available are denoted with N/A.

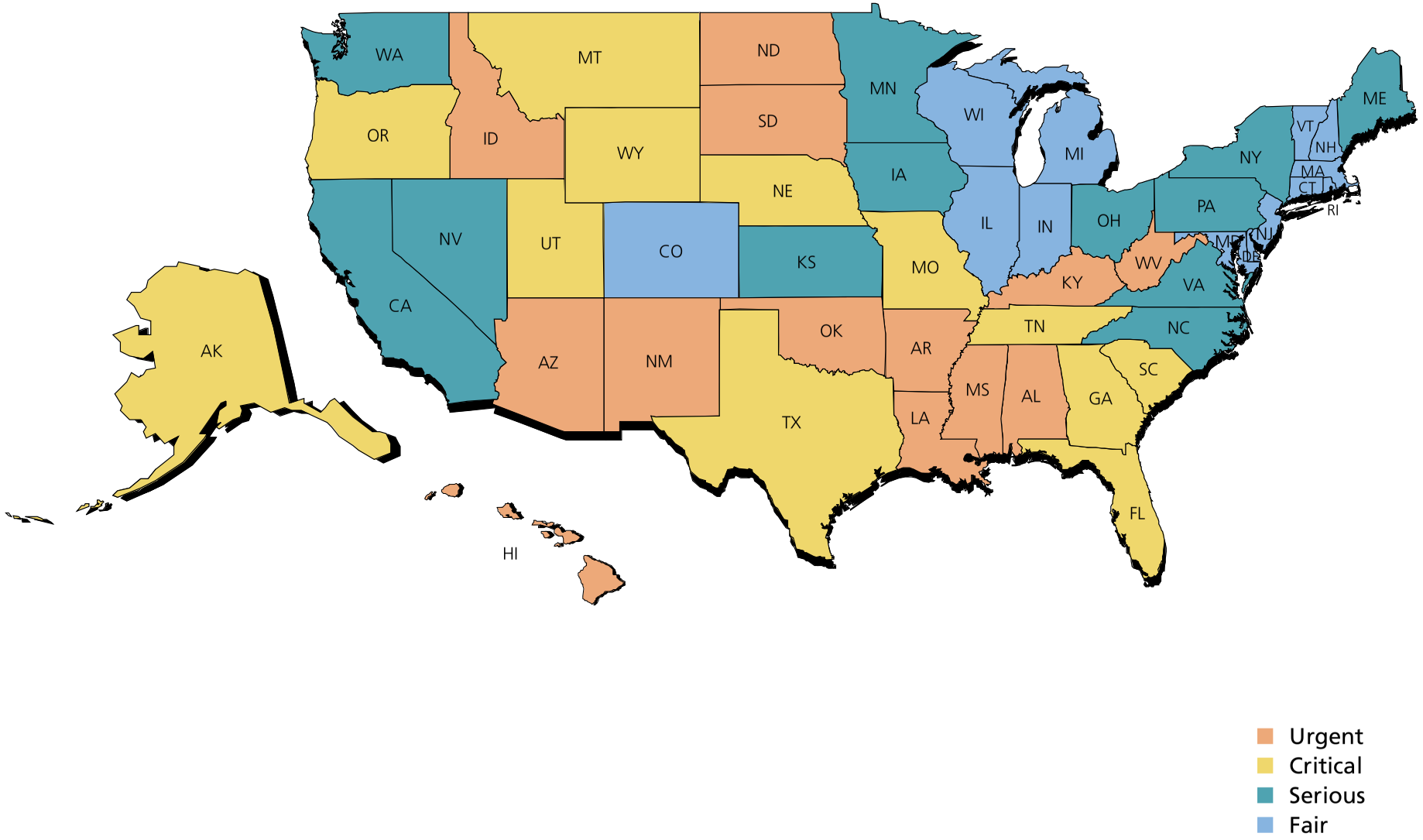
Hawaii and Vermont each presented unique problems with regard to indicators related to school finance. Hawaii's public schools operate as a single school district under the Hawaii state department of education. Since school finance data is compiled and reported at the district level, this single-district organizational structure made it impossible to disaggregate data by locale (i.e., rural and non-rural). Vermont operates K-12 districts, elementary-only districts, and secondary-only districts. NCES reporting of Vermont's school finance data does not account for the fact that much state and local revenue that is received by elementary-only districts merely flows through that district to be paid as tuition to the public school district providing educational services for secondary students. The resulting data grossly inflates the revenue levels of elementary-only districts.

2 In the case of Montana and South Dakota, the discrepancy is probably also attributable in part to meal rate data that is impacted by the presence of very small schools that do not operate school lunch programs.

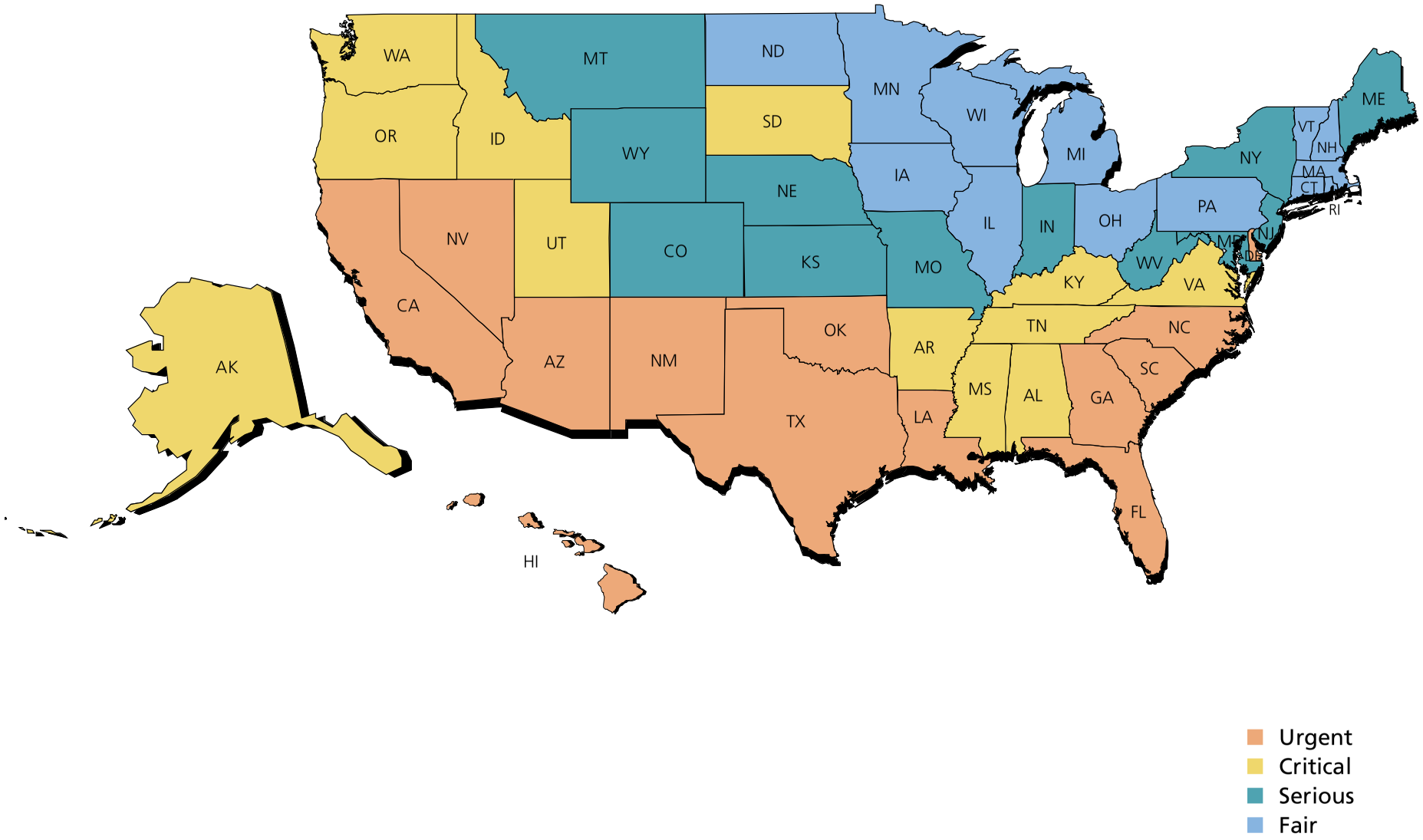
Importance Gauge Rankings



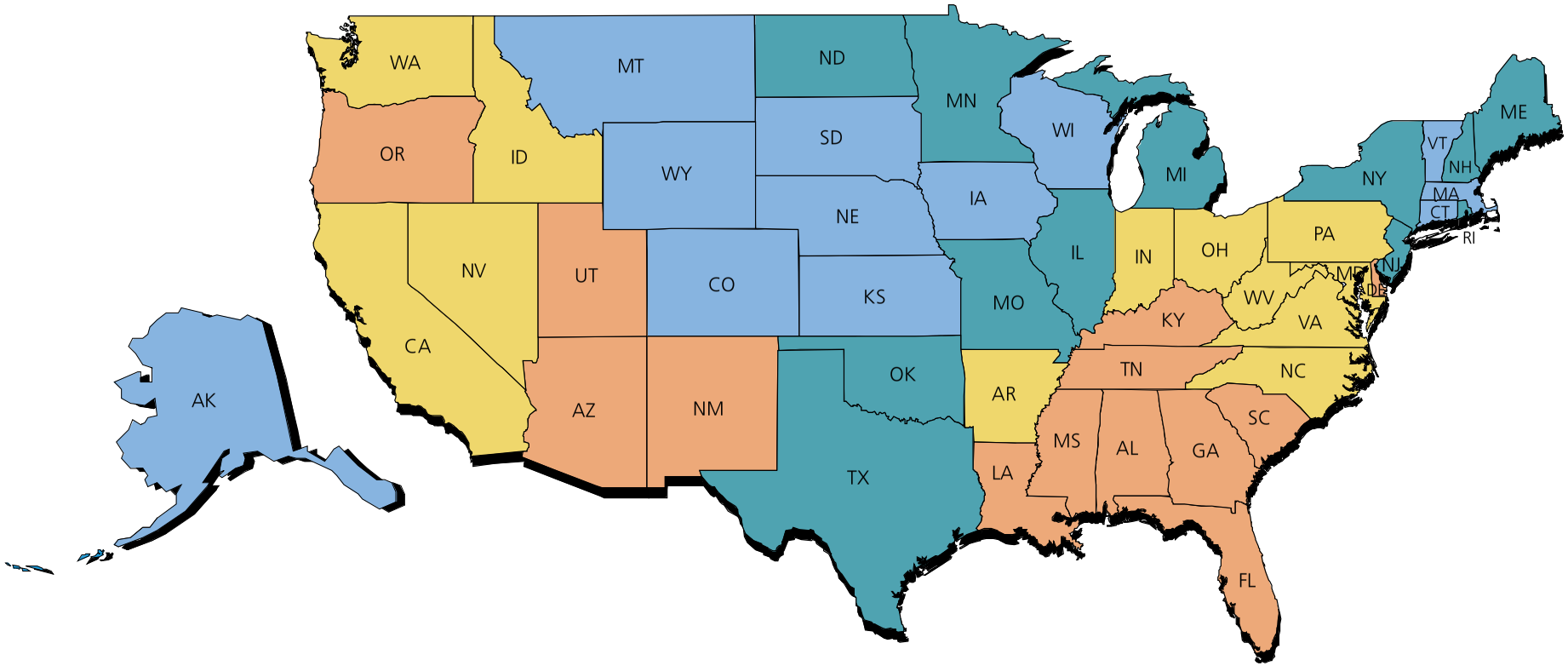
Poverty Gauge Rankings



Challenges Gauge Rankings



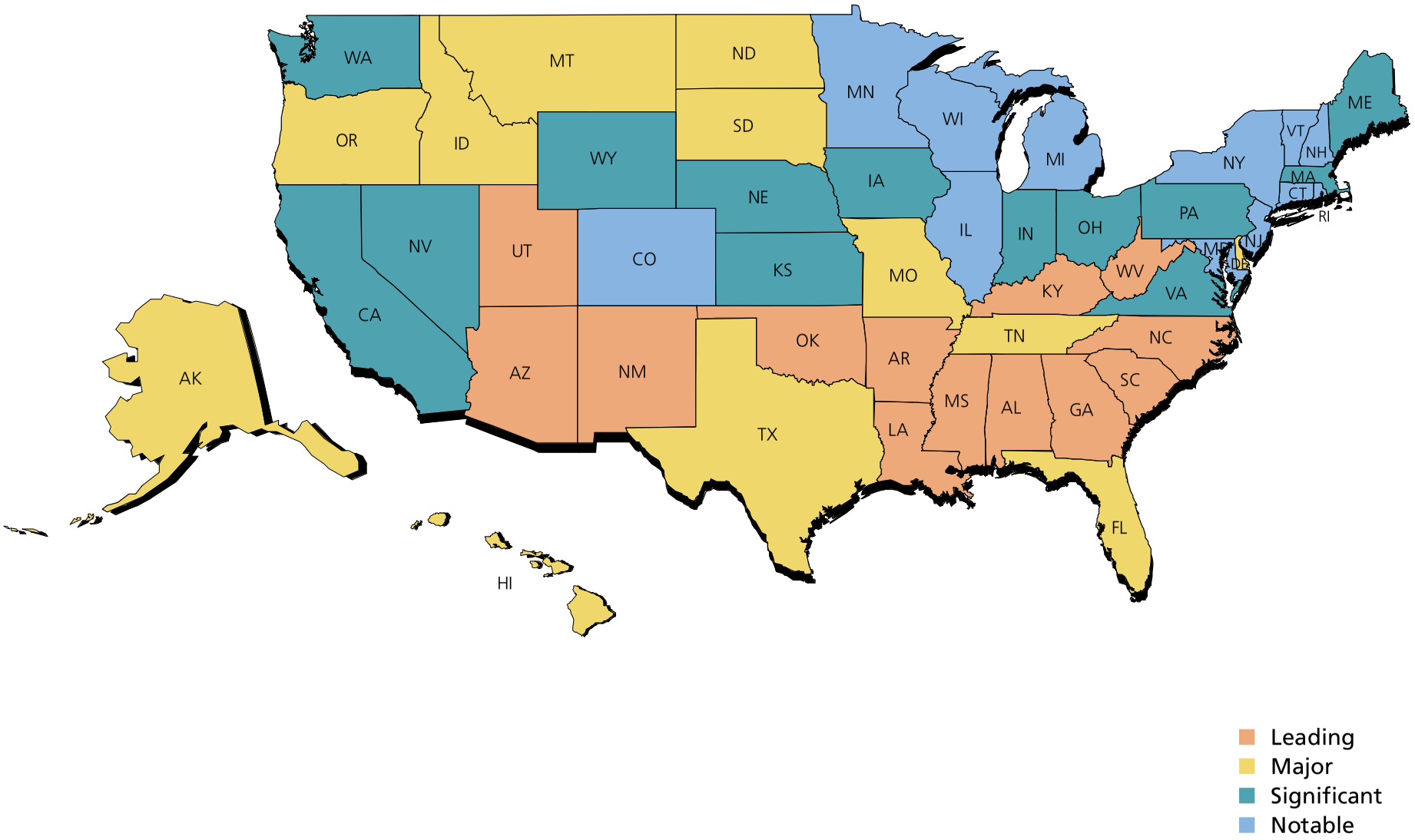
Policy Outcomes Gauge Rankings



Note: HI excluded because of lack of available data

- Crucial
- Very Important
- Important
- Notable

Rural Education Priority Rankings

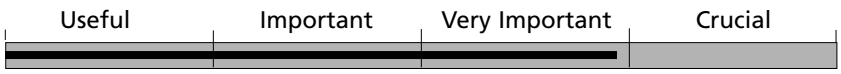


ALABAMA – Consistently near the top on all four gauges, Alabama ranks 5th overall among the 50 states. Contributing to this ranking are high percentages of rural students and rural schools, high rural poverty, low educational attainment among rural adults, and low student test scores and graduation rates. The organizational scale of schooling is large, and the combination of relatively equitable funding levels and relatively low per pupil instructional expenditures suggests that Alabama's rural schools cope with roughly equal levels of inadequate funding.

PRIORITY RANKING

5

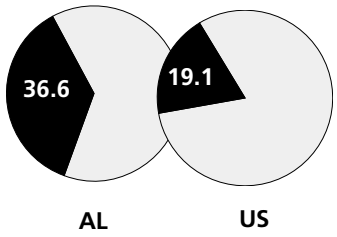
Importance Gauge: Rank 13



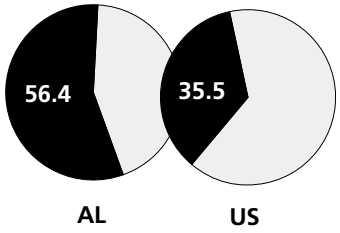
	AL	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	264,945	13
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	36.6%	11
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	41.0%	20
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	18.6%	14
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	27.8%	18

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

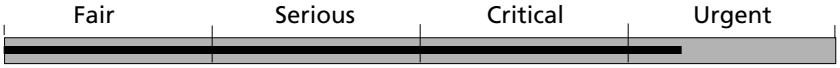
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line



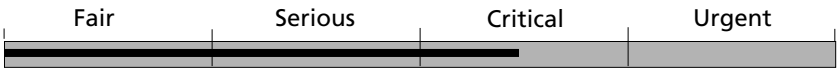
Poverty Gauge: Rank 9



	AL	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	51.1%	10
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	16.7%	8
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	56.4%	7
Rural per capita income	$16,683	10
Rural per pupil property wealth	$98,767	18

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 19

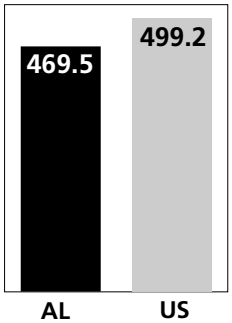


	AL	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.0%	45
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.6%	40
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	28.6%	15
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	29.4%	3
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.1%	19

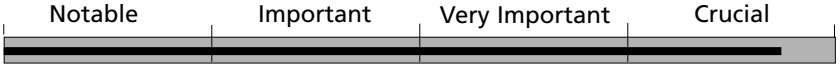
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma

Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 4



	AL	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$771	46
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,546	9
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.1%	14
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.1	16
Median organizational scale (x 100)	20,652	6
Rural four-year graduation rate	60.4%	9
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	469.5	3

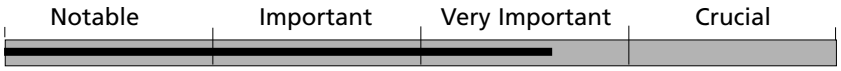
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

ALASKA – With critically high rates of poverty and other challenges, Alaska ranks 22nd in overall priority among the 50 states. Contributing to these rankings are: a large percentage of rural schools and a large portion of the state's education funding going to rural schools; high poverty; and a low graduation rate. The combination of a relatively inequitable distribution of revenue but overall high levels of per pupil spending on instruction suggests that Alaska's rural schools are among some of the highest and the lowest funded schools in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

22

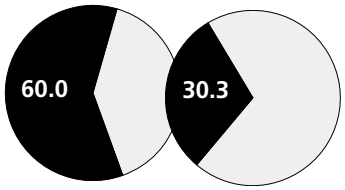
Importance Gauge: Rank 18



	AK	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	36,423	45
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	28.4%	21
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	60.0%	6
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	21.9%	12
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	42.7%	9

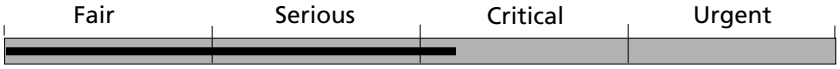
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

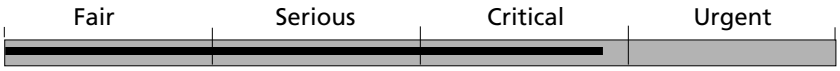
Poverty Gauge: Rank 22



	AK	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	51.1%	9
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.5%	21
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	40.7%	41
Rural per capita income	$20,567	34
Rural per pupil property wealth	$75,465	6

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

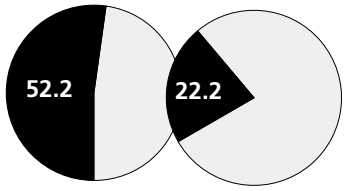
Challenges Gauge: Rank 14



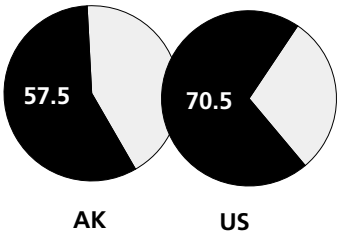
	AK	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	5.3%	6
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.2%	45
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	52.2%	3
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	14.2%	37
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	20.2%	3

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Rural four-year graduation rate



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 37

	AK	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$4,726	7
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$6,678	50
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	2.4%	49
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.1	22
Median organizational scale (x 100)	359	44
Rural four-year graduation rate	57.5	5
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	NA	NA

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

ARIZONA – Only 10% of Arizona's public school students attend rural schools, but high rural poverty, demographic challenges, and undesirable policy outcomes lead to an overall ranking of 9. The state's rural schools serve an impoverished and culturally diverse student population, with high rates of English Language Learners and student mobility. Very few rural students attend small schools. Funding gaps are sizable, and per pupil spending on instruction is among the lowest in the nation. Arizona's rural schools are among the lowest in the nation on NAEP scores and graduation rates.

PRIORITY RANKING

9

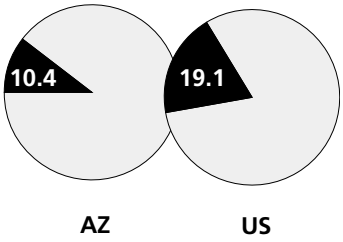
Importance Gauge: Rank 44

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

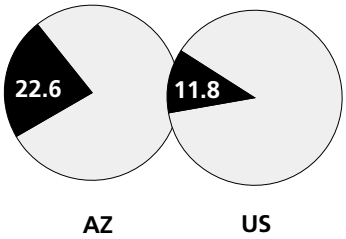
	AZ	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	84,519	33
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	10.4%	44
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	18.0%	41
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	4.4%	41
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	10.1%	43

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 11

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	AZ	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	35.5%	25
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	22.6%	2
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	57.2%	5
Rural per capita income	$17,533	16
Rural per pupil property wealth	$105,043	20

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

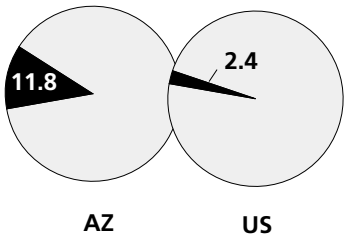
Challenges Gauge: Rank 4

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

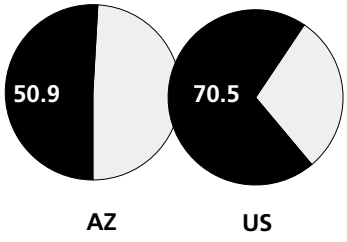
	AZ	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	11.8%	2
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.1%	37
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	49.9%	4
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	24.2%	13
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	21.1%	2

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"



Rural four-year graduation rate



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 2

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	AZ	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$4,624	8
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,535	7
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.4%	29
Rural student-teacher ratio	17.0	10
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,369	31
Rural four-year graduation rate	50.9%	3
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	477.5	5

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

ARKANSAS – In the top quartile on two of the four gauges, Arkansas ranks 7th overall among the 50 states. Contributing to these rankings are high rural poverty, low educational attainment among rural adults, high rates of mobility in rural communities, and low test scores and graduation rates. Like Alabama, the combination of equity in revenues and overall low levels of spending on instruction suggests that the state's rural schools cope with roughly equal levels of inadequate funding.

PRIORITY RANKING

7

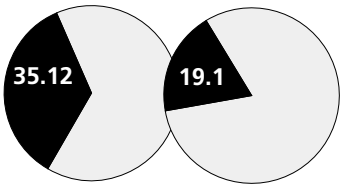
Importance Gauge: Rank 13

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	AR	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	157,909	24
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	35.12%	12
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	49.0%	14
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	21.8%	13
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	28.9%	13

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 7

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	AR	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	50.7%	11
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.7%	9
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	53.7%	10
Rural per capita income	$16,117	6
Rural per pupil property wealth	$68,832	5

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

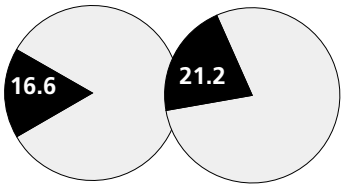
Challenges Gauge: Rank 15

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

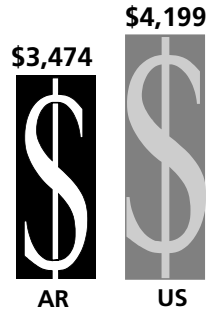
	AR	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.2%	38
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.0%	24
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	18.2%	22
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	27.0%	9
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	16.6%	11

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 24

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	AR	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$829	45
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,474	4
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.9%	36
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.1	31
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,379	30
Rural four-year graduation rate	73.1	25
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	483.0	6

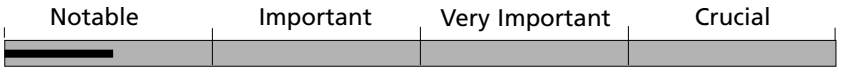
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

CALIFORNIA – Although only 5% of California's public school students attend rural schools, they represent a larger rural enrollment than all but seven other states. Demographic challenges and undesirable policy outcomes lead to an overall ranking of 28. The state's schools serve a culturally diverse student population, with high rates of English Language Learners and student mobility. California has the highest student-teacher ratios of any state, very few rural students attending small schools, and NAEP scores and graduation rates that are among the worst in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

28

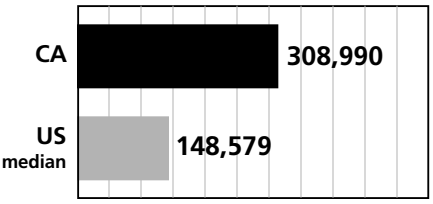
Importance Gauge: Rank 43



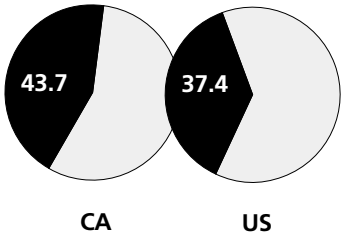
	CA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	308,990	8
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	5.2%	49
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	11.0%	47
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	2.3%	47
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	3.6%	49

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

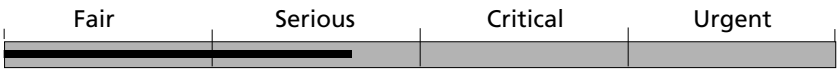
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



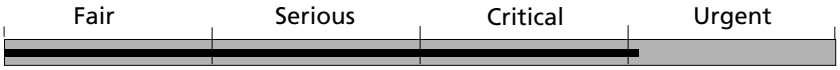
Poverty Gauge: Rank 29



	CA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	43.7%	14
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	13.5%	15
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	47.5%	24
Rural per capita income	$23,905	42
Rural per pupil property wealth	$266,964	45

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

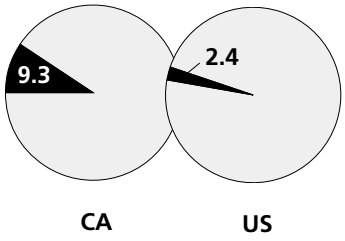
Challenges Gauge: Rank 12



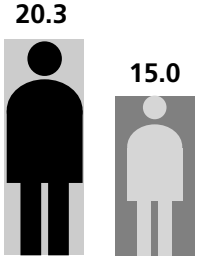
	CA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	9.3%	13
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	9.2%	49
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	44.0%	6
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	19.4%	20
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.9%	14

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"



Rural student-teacher ratio



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 14

	CA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,544	20
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,239	29
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	2.5%	48
Rural student-teacher ratio	20.3	1
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,218	33
Rural four-year graduation rate	58.9%	7
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	484.5	8

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

COLORADO ranks consistently low in importance and urgency across all four gauges. Relatively low levels of poverty, low rates of students with special needs, and high levels of adult educational attainment contribute to an overall priority ranking in the bottom quartile, at 43. Still, the state's rural schools must meet the needs of a highly mobile rural population—the 3rd highest among the 50 states. Rural per pupil expenditures are below the national average, and inequity in the distribution of funds is apparent.

PRIORITY RANKING

43

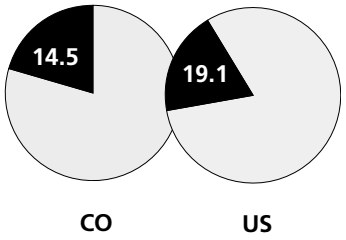
Importance Gauge: Rank 37

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

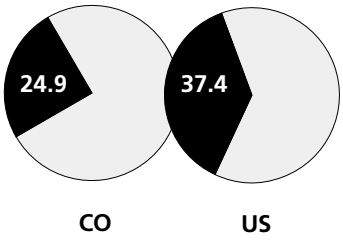
	CO	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	102,909	30
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	14.5%	37
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	29.0%	31
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	8.6%	31
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	14.9%	38

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



Poverty Gauge: Rank 44

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	CO	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	24.9%	38
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.6%	35
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	42.6%	34
Rural per capita income	$24,865	45
Rural per pupil property wealth	$263,358	44

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

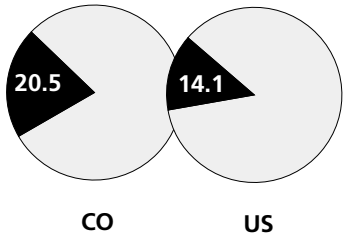
Challenges Gauge: Rank 26

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	CO	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	3.5%	10
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	10.4%	48
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	20.7%	18
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	11.5%	48
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	20.5%	3

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 39

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	CO	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,314	15
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,871	19
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.2%	44
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.8	25
Median organizational scale (x 100)	731	41
Rural four-year graduation rate	79.7%	31
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	512.0	41

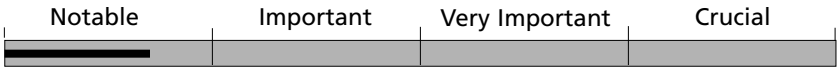
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

CONNECTICUT – Connecticut's rural schools contend with fewer barriers to student achievement than any other state, and the state is awarded the second lowest overall priority ranking. Poverty rates and student mobility are low, adult educational attainment is high, and the level of per pupil spending on instruction in rural schools is among the highest of the 50 states. The combination of few challenges and ample resources results in achievement outcomes that are among the best—Connecticut's rural schools have the 3rd highest NAEP scores and the 8th highest graduation rate in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

49

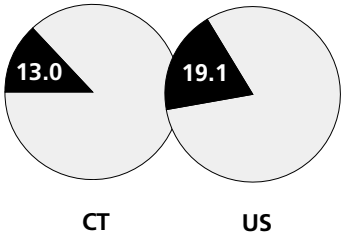
Importance Gauge: Rank 41



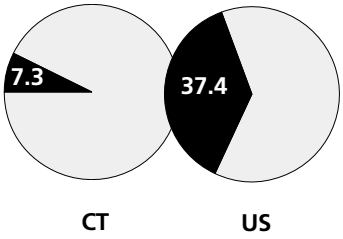
	CT	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	70,621	35
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	13.0%	38
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	16.0%	45
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	3.6%	43
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	15.9%	35

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

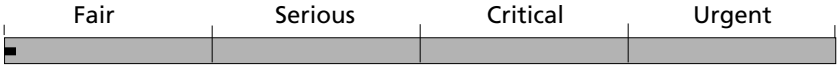
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



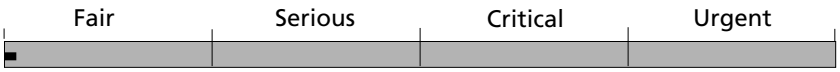
Poverty Gauge: Rank 50



	CT	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	7.3%	50
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	2.5%	50
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.3%	50
Rural per capita income	$33,428	50
Rural per pupil property wealth	$422,170	48

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

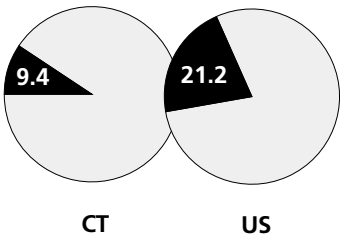
Challenges Gauge: Rank 50



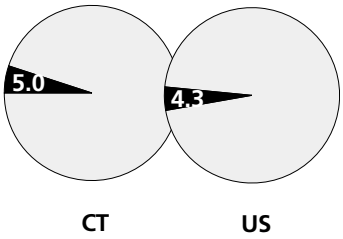
	CT	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.7%	20
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.5%	41
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.3%	34
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	9.4%	50
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.3%	44

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 43

	CT	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,228	17
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,803	48
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.0%	16
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.0	40
Median organizational scale (x 100)	5,797	17
Rural four-year graduation rate	83.9%	43
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	530.0	48

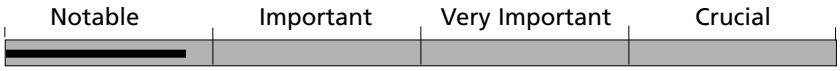
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

DELAWARE is one of the nation's least rural states, and its rural communities are among the least impoverished. Despite this, the state ranks 6th on challenges and 9th on policy outcomes, suggesting that policymakers look closely at rural schools. Educational attainment among adults is low, and rates of English Language Learners, special education students, and minority students are high. Schools and districts are among the largest in the U.S., and a high percentage of education funding goes to pay for transportation to large regional schools that are far from many students' home communities.

PRIORITY RANKING

24

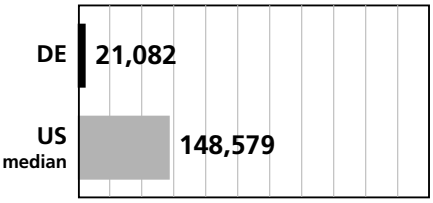
Importance Gauge: Rank 39



	DE	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	21,082	49
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	20.5%	31
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	21.0%	38
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	3.4%	44
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	17.3%	32

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



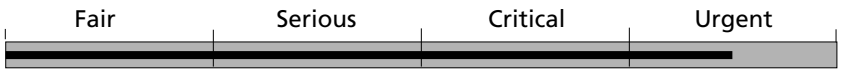
Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 39

	DE	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	35.6%	24
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.9%	33
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	42.2%	36
Rural per capita income	$21,303	41
Rural per pupil property wealth	$252,852	42

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

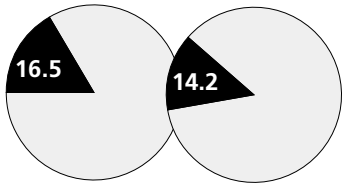
Challenges Gauge: Rank 6



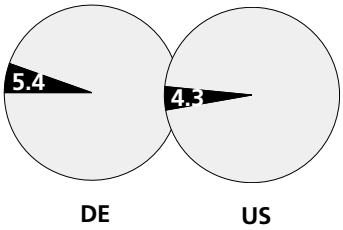
	DE	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.6%	13
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.5%	6
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	30.6%	12
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	22.2%	16
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.2%	27

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

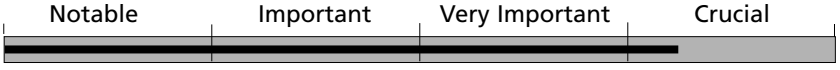
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 9



	DE	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,179	24
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,107	42
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.4%	8
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.8	19
Median organizational scale (x 100)	20,601	7
Rural four-year graduation rate	67.6%	15
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	498.5	20

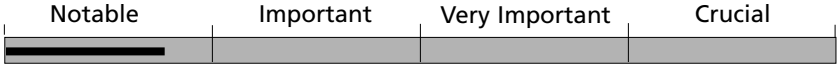
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

FLORIDA – Only about 12% of Florida's public school students attend rural schools, yet at more than 280,000, they number more than the total rural student enrollment in 14 other states combined. Based on demographic challenges and undesirable policy outcomes, the state has an overall ranking of 13. Its schools serve a diverse student population, with high rates of English Language Learners, special education students, and student mobility. Florida's schools and districts are among the nation's largest, with fewer than 2% of rural students attending small schools. The state has the 5th lowest rural per pupil instructional spending, and only a little over half of the state's rural students earn a high school diploma in four years.

PRIORITY RANKING

13

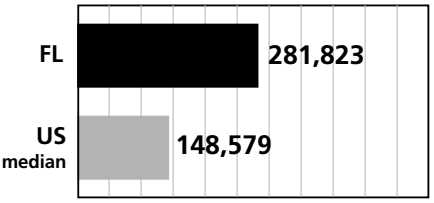
Importance Gauge: Rank 41



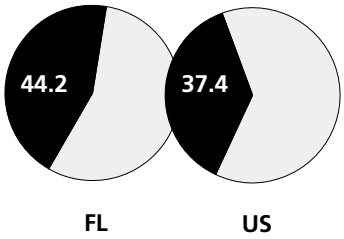
	FL	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	281,823	11
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	11.6%	43
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	14.0%	46
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	1.9%	48
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	6.3%	48

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

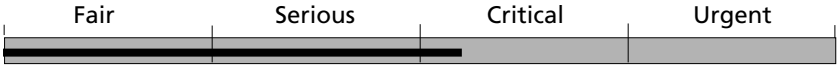
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



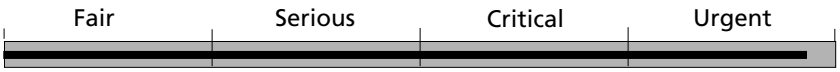
Poverty Gauge: Rank 23



	FL	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	44.2%	13
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	13.5%	15
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	48.1%	22
Rural per capita income	$19,441	26
Rural per pupil property wealth	$215,656	41

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

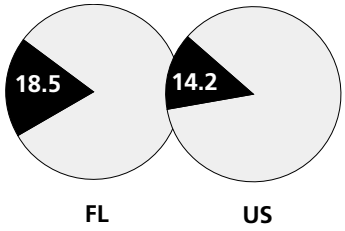
Challenges Gauge: Rank 2



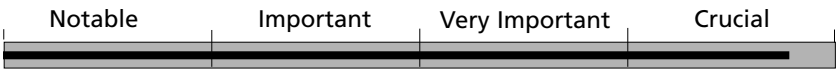
	FL	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	3.5%	10
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	18.5%	3
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	28.6%	14
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	23.0%	15
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	17.9%	6

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



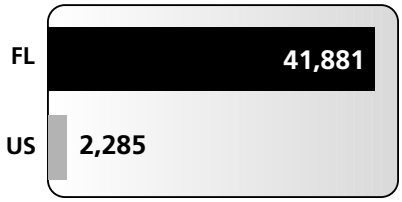
Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 3



	FL	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,433	35
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,489	5
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.4%	28
Rural student-teacher ratio	18.0	5
Median organizational scale (x 100)	41,881	2
Rural four-year graduation rate	53.5%	4
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	496.5	18

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Median organizational scale



GEORGIA – More than one-fourth of all public school students in Georgia attend rural schools—a total of nearly 400,000 students. Minority enrollment is high in rural areas, as is the percentage of students who qualify for subsidized meals and the rate of household mobility. Educational attainment among rural adults is among the nation's lowest, and the four-year graduation rates of current students suggest little in the way of improving that ranking. The median organizational scale of schooling in rural areas is about 13 times larger than the national median, and student-teacher ratios are high.

PRIORITY RANKING

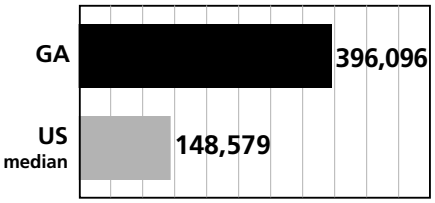
12

Importance Gauge: Rank 26

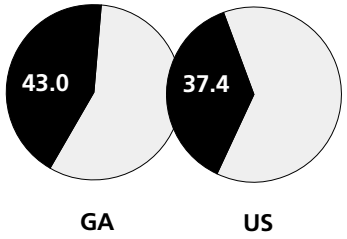
	GA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	396,096	4
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	27.1%	24
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	30.0%	30
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	4.9%	38
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	25.8	23

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

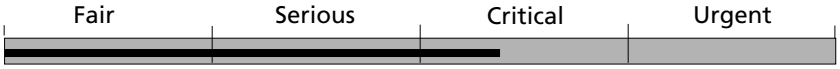
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



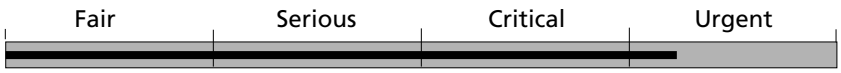
Poverty Gauge: Rank 20



	GA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	43.0%	16
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.9%	18
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	46.3%	26
Rural per capita income	$18,337	20
Rural per pupil property wealth	$136,225	23

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

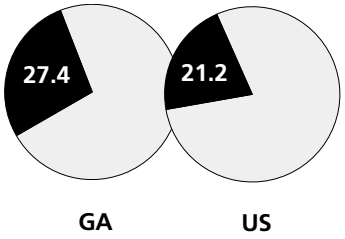
Challenges Gauge: Rank 9



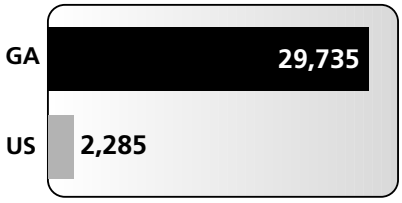
	GA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.9%	19
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.0%	24
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	29.3%	13
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	27.4%	8
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	16.2%	12

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

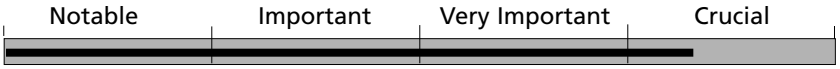
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 8



	GA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,600	32
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,112	25
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.5%	42
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.2	15
Median organizational scale (x 100)	29,735	4
Rural four-year graduation rate	50.2	2
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	488.5	13

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

HAWAII ranks 45th in terms of importance, yet high poverty, extensive demographic challenges, and undesirable policy outcomes land the state a place in the highest priority quartile. The 22,105 students served by Hawaii's rural schools rank among the nation's most impoverished and most transient; the state's schools have the highest percentage of minority students and the 4th highest percentage of students learning the English language. Note: School finance indicators could not be computed for Hawaii because the state's schools are organized as a single district.

PRIORITY RANKING

22

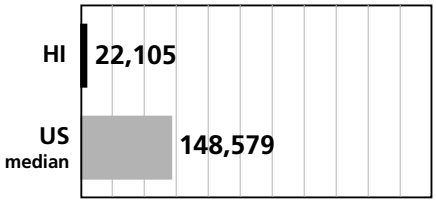
Importance Gauge: Rank 45

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

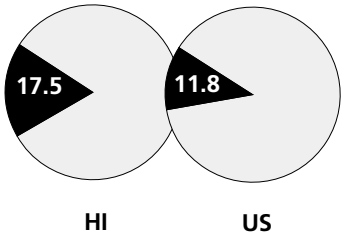
	HI	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	22,105	48
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	12.3%	40
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	18.0%	41
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	5.4%	37
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	NA	NA

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 12

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	HI	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	54.4%	8
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	17.5%	7
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	51.5%	15
Rural per capita income	$20,113	30
Rural per pupil property wealth	NA	NA

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

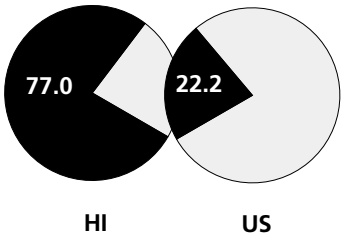
Challenges Gauge: Rank 12

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

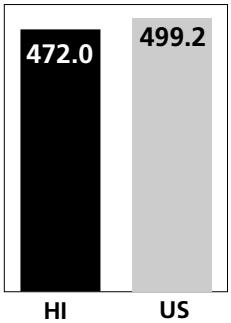
	HI	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	7.0%	4
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	9.0%	50
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	77.0%	1
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	15.1%	32
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	18.7%	5

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8



Policy Outcomes Gauge: NA (insufficient data for calculating indicators)

Hawaii's data does not allow for the needed analyses.

	HI	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	NA	NA
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,956	20
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	NA	NA
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.5	12
Median organizational scale (x 100)	NA	NA
Rural four-year graduation rate	65.6%	13
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	472.0	4

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

IDAHO ranks near the middle in terms of importance, but high poverty levels and serious demographic challenges raise its overall ranking to just outside the top priority quartile. High rankings on all five poverty indicators suggest that Idaho's rural schools face serious economic disadvantages. Rural populations are fairly diverse, with the nation's 8th highest percentage of English Language Learners. Although the organizational scale is moderately small, student-teacher ratios are low, and graduation rates are high, performance on NAEP lags behind both the national average and that of bordering states.

PRIORITY RANKING

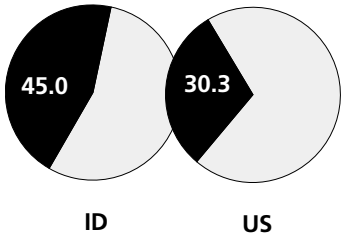
15

Importance Gauge: Rank 26

	ID	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	63,760	37
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	26.5%	25
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	45.0%	17
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	17.2%	19
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	26.7%	21

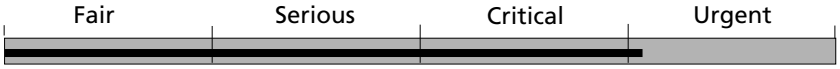
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line

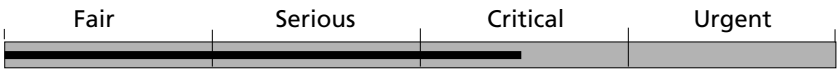
Poverty Gauge: Rank 13



	ID	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	43.2%	15
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.2%	23
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	53.4%	12
Rural per capita income	$17,170	14
Rural per pupil property wealth	$93,829	15

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

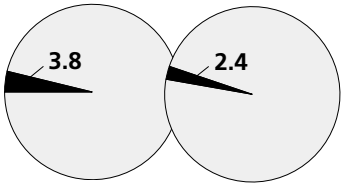
Challenges Gauge: Rank 19



	ID	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	3.8%	8
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.0%	46
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	14.7%	26
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	17.0%	25
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.5%	17

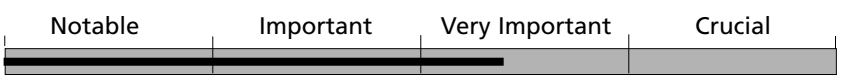
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 20



	ID	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,456	21
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,621	11
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.9%	19
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.4	13
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,232	32
Rural four-year graduation rate	84.1%	44
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	489.5	15

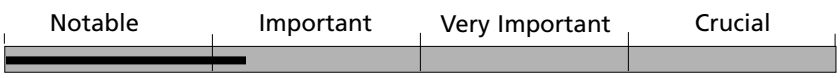
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

ILLINOIS – Rural students make up only 12% of the student population in Illinois, yet they number nearly 250,000. Poverty ranks consistently low across various measures of economic well-being, as do demographic challenges. One exception is the percentage of special education students, where Illinois ranks 10th overall. Illinois' rural schools spend proportionally more on transportation than most other states, and they spend less on instruction.

PRIORITY RANKING

43

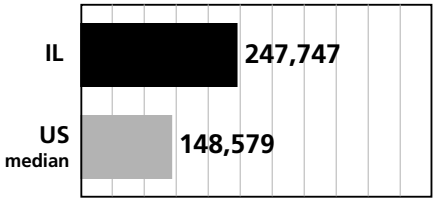
Importance Gauge: Rank 36



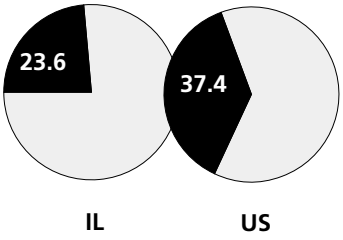
	IL	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	247,747	14
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	12.2%	41
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	25.0%	34
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	8.1%	32
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	12.6%	41

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

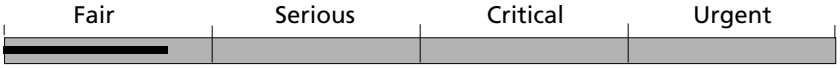
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



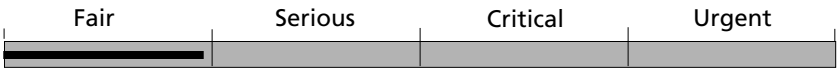
Poverty Gauge: Rank 40



	IL	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	23.6%	43
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	7.8%	39
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	44.8%	29
Rural per capita income	$20,528	33
Rural per pupil property wealth	$166,074	34

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

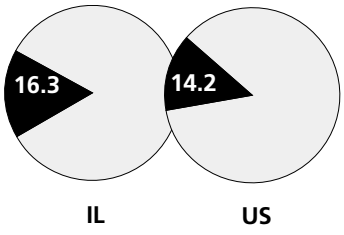
Challenges Gauge: Rank 38



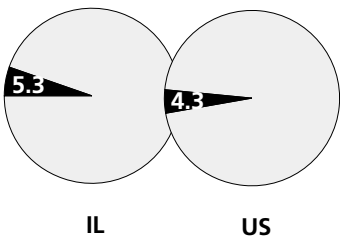
	IL	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.0%	45
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.3%	10
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.0%	36
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	15.8%	29
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.6%	41

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 28

	IL	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,167	25
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,827	16
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.3%	10
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.4	28
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,160	36
Rural four-year graduation rate	83.7%	42
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	507.0	30

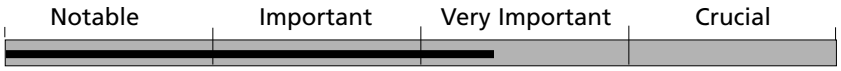
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

INDIANA – More than one-third of Indiana's public schools are located in rural areas, and they serve nearly 300,000 students. Poverty levels are consistently low, as reflected in an overall poverty ranking of 42. Likewise, challenges are low, with the exception of Indiana's high percentage of special education students. Large schools and districts, high student-teacher ratios, and a high percentage of funds going toward pupil transportation produce a "very important" ranking in policy outcomes.

PRIORITY RANKING

31

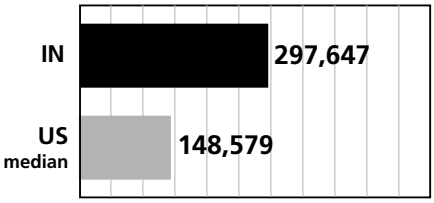
Importance Gauge: Rank 19



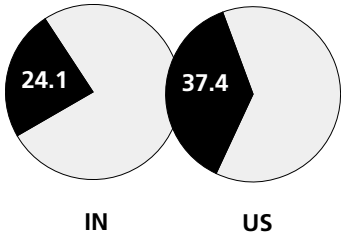
	IN	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	297,647	10
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	30.0%	18
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	36.0%	24
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	12.0%	24
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	26.4%	22

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals

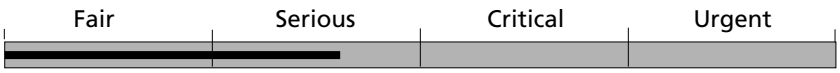


Poverty Gauge: Rank 42

	IN	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	24.1%	41
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	6.2%	43
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	35.7%	45
Rural per capita income	$20,026	28
Rural per pupil property wealth	$150,014	30

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

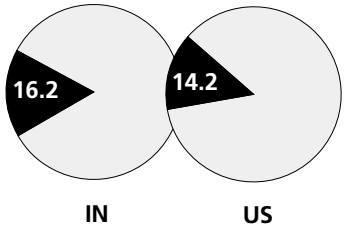
Challenges Gauge: Rank 30



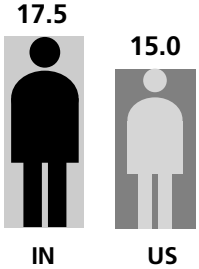
	IN	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.6%	25
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.2%	12
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	4.3%	42
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	17.4%	24
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.4%	36

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

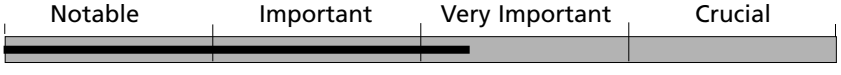
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



Rural student-teacher ratio



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 22



	IN	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,125	41
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,002	24
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.0%	15
Rural student-teacher ratio	17.5	8
Median organizational scale (x 100)	6,898	16
Rural four-year graduation rate	75.4%	27
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	510.0	37

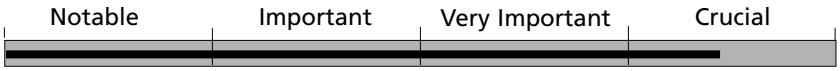
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

IOWA ranks high in importance, but lower on poverty, and among the very lowest in the country on challenges and policy outcomes. Iowa's rural schools, on average, face fewer barriers to student achievement, and student outcomes suggest that the educational system is getting the job done at higher levels than nearly all other states. The state has relatively small schools and districts, and student-teacher ratios are lower than all but seven other states. Almost 90% of Iowa's rural students graduate in four years, compared with a national rate of 70.4%.

PRIORITY RANKING

37

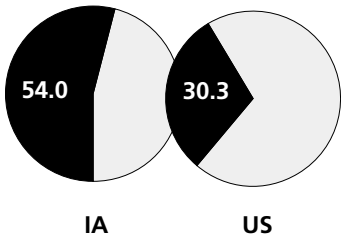
Importance Gauge: Rank 7



	IA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	181,024	23
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	38.0%	9
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	54.0%	8
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	30.2%	5
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	28.4%	14

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 32

	IA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	24.3%	40
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	7.4%	41
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	41.4%	39
Rural per capita income	$19,007	24
Rural per pupil property wealth	$95,837	17

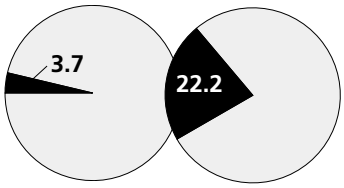
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 48

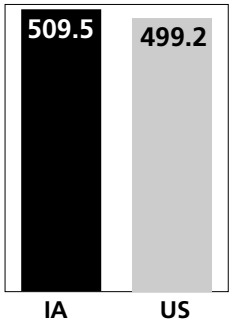
	IA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.3%	36
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.0%	37
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	3.7%	45
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.7%	39
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.3%	37

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

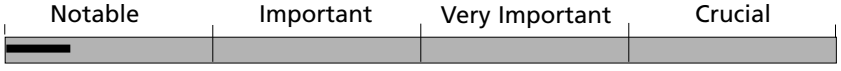
Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 46



	IA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,402	36
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,849	18
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.9%	37
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.6	43
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,169	35
Rural four-year graduation rate	88.2%	49
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	509.5	36

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

KANSAS – Half of all public schools in Kansas are located in rural areas, and they serve nearly one-third of all students in the state—with close to one-fifth of those students in small rural schools. Although a composite ranking of 28 puts Kansas in the third quartile in priority for addressing poverty, the property wealth indicator (i.e., the tax base available to local districts) is among the lowest in the nation and per pupil spending on instruction is lower than all but nine states. Schools and districts are small, as are student-teacher ratios, and NAEP scores and graduation rates are both high.

PRIORITY RANKING

32

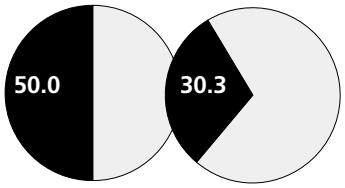
Importance Gauge: Rank 11

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	KS	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	150,814	25
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	32.4%	14
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	50.0%	11
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	22.9%	10
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	30.7%	12

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 28

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	KS	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	30.7%	34
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.2%	37
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	43.6%	32
Rural per capita income	$18,946	22
Rural per pupil property wealth	$87,826	12

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

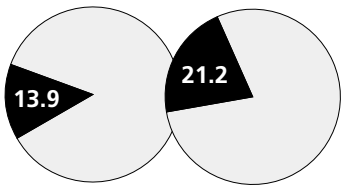
Challenges Gauge: Rank 37

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

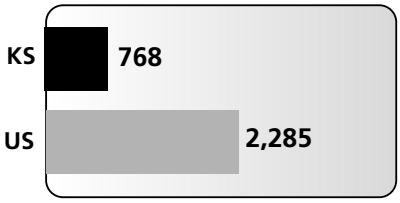
	KS	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.6%	25
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.3%	35
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	10.7%	30
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.9%	38
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	13.4%	31

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 39

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	KS	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,126	26
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,574	10
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.7%	22
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.1	38
Median organizational scale (x 100)	768	40
Rural four-year graduation rate	82.6%	39
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	512.0	41

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

KENTUCKY – Rural education in Kentucky is crucially important, with rural schools serving nearly 40% of the total student population. Overcoming poverty and other challenges, like low levels of adult educational attainment, is made more difficult by policy outcomes like large schools and districts, relatively low levels of spending on instruction, and a larger than average portion of available revenues going toward transportation. Graduation rates are low, as are NAEP scores. Positioned in the top two quartiles on 18 of 22 indicators, Kentucky gets a priority ranking of 3rd among the 50 states.

PRIORITY RANKING

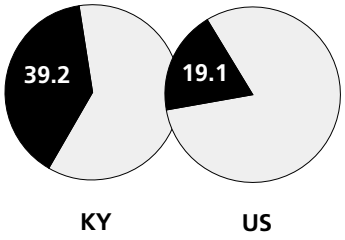
3

Importance Gauge: Rank 9

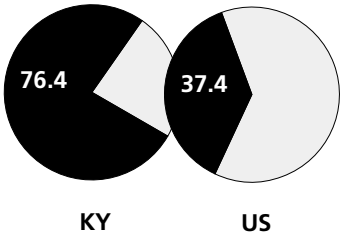
	KY	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	243,167	16
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	39.2%	8
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	47.0%	16
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	18.6%	15
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	38.6%	10

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

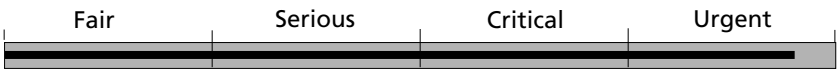
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



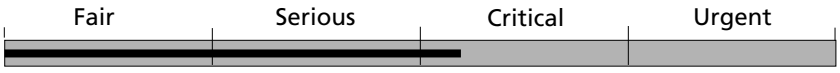
Poverty Gauge: Rank 2



	KY	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	76.4%	1
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	19.7%	5
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	60.2%	3
Rural per capita income	$15,893	5
Rural per pupil property wealth	$87,063	11

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

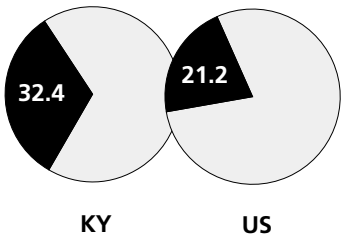
Challenges Gauge: Rank 23



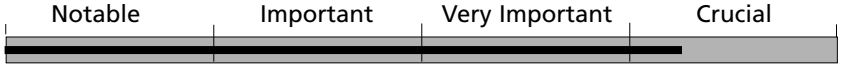
	KY	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	0.9%	48
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.3%	8
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	3.9%	44
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	32.4%	1
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.6%	23

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



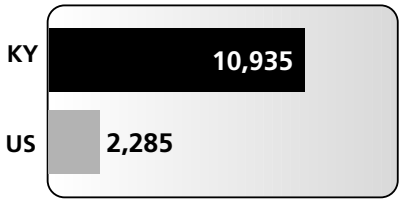
Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 9



	KY	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$620	47
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,748	15
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.3%	11
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.1	17
Median organizational scale (x 100)	10,935	14
Rural four-year graduation rate	66.3%	14
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	494.5	17

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Median organizational scale



LOUISIANA – Ranking in the top 10 on all five poverty indicators, Louisiana's rural schools serve some of the most impoverished communities in the U.S. The rural minority population is sizable, the percentage of English Language Learners is moderately high, and educational attainment for rural adults is lower than all but four states. Instructional expenditures are low, spending on transportation is high, and schools and districts are large in comparison with other states. NAEP scores and graduation rates are among the nation's lowest, reflected in overall priority ranking of 4.

PRIORITY RANKING

4

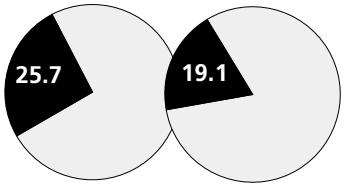
Importance Gauge: Rank 30

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

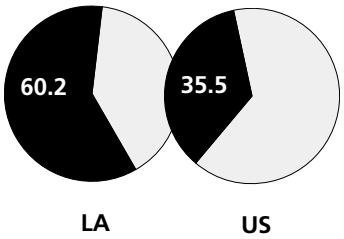
	LA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	183,623	22
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	25.7%	27
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	32.0%	28
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	14.0%	22
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	16.4%	34

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 3

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	LA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	59.6%	4
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	18.7%	6
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	60.2%	3
Rural per capita income	$15,495	4
Rural per pupil property wealth	$84,154	9

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

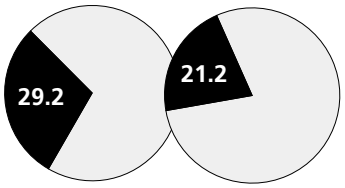
Challenges Gauge: Rank 10

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	LA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.3%	18
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.2%	22
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	35.3%	9
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	29.2%	5
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.1%	28

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 1

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	LA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,694	30
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,542	8
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	6.1%	2
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.7	26
Median organizational scale (x 100)	15,010	9
Rural four-year graduation rate	60.8%	10
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	483	6

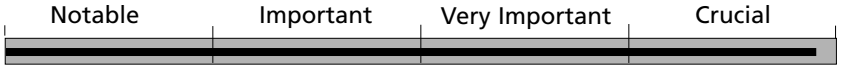
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MAINE – With more than half of its students and more than 60% of its schools in rural areas, Maine ranks highest among the 50 states in terms of rural importance. Well over half of all state dollars spent on education go to Maine's rural schools, and are used to provide per pupil instructional expenditures that are among the nation's highest. Poverty and other challenges are serious, however, with the percentage of special education students among the nation's highest. Policy outcomes rank moderately low, with two exceptions: the rural graduation rate is the 17th worst in the U.S. and state revenue distribution is only moderately equal.

PRIORITY RANKING

26

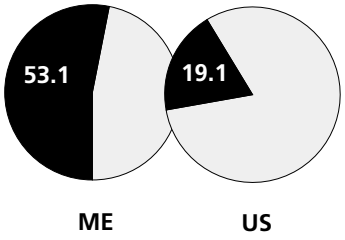
Importance Gauge: Rank 1



	ME	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	107,997	29
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	53.1%	2
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	63.0%	5
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	30.1%	6
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	56.1%	2

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



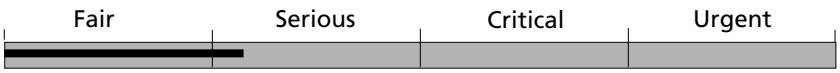
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals

Poverty Gauge: Rank 26

	ME	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	33.4%	29
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.4%	28
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	49.0%	18
Rural per capita income	$19,006	23
Rural per pupil property wealth	$148,140	28

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

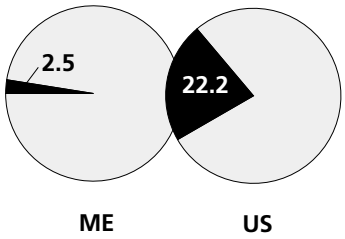
Challenges Gauge: Rank 36



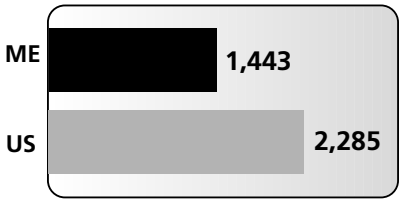
	ME	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.5%	29
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	15.9%	13
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	2.5%	50
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	14.8%	35
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	13.6%	30

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 32

	ME	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,399	22
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,081	41
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.4%	30
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.0	39
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,443	29
Rural four-year graduation rate	69.7%	17
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	504.0	26

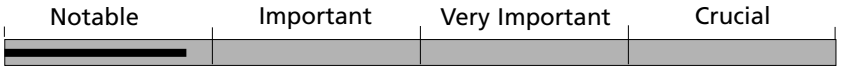
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MARYLAND is not very rural, and the state contends with far less poverty than most other states. Non-poverty challenges are rated serious, but no single indicator ranks higher than 20th (for percent minority population). Still, outcomes rank as very important, suggesting that rural schools in the state need help and demand the attention of policymakers. Undesirable policy outcomes include: large schools and districts (median organizational scale is nearly 17 times higher than the national median and the 3rd highest in the U.S.); high student-teacher ratios; and high spending on transportation.

PRIORITY RANKING

38

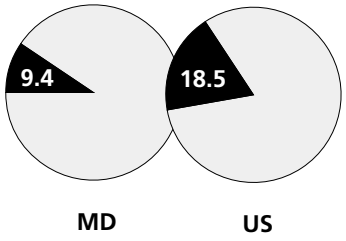
Importance Gauge: Rank 39



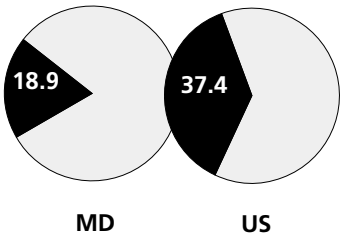
	MD	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	128,313	27
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	15.3%	35
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	17.0%	44
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	4.1%	42
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	9.4%	46

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

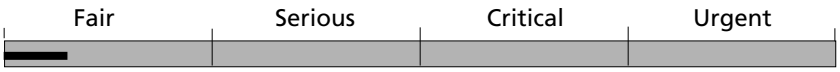
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



Poverty Gauge: Rank 46



	MD	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	18.9%	45
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	5.5%	45
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	30.9%	47
Rural per capita income	$25,785	46
Rural per pupil property wealth	$201,584	39

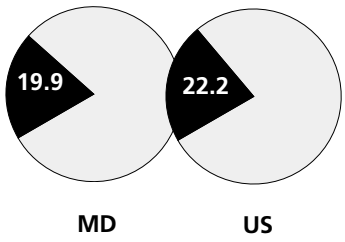
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 34

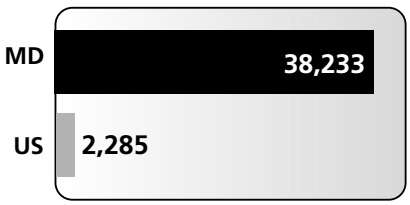
	MD	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.4%	32
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.9%	29
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	19.9%	20
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	16.6%	26
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.3%	44

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

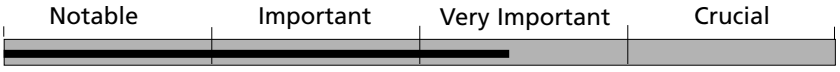
Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 19



	MD	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$837	44
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,430	34
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.3%	9
Rural student-teacher ratio	17.0	9
Median organizational scale (x 100)	38,233	3
Rural four-year graduation rate	70.2%	18
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	510.0	37

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MASSACHUSETTS is the least rural state in the U.S., with only 6% of its schools and less than 5% of its students in rural areas. Rural Massachusetts is relatively affluent, in terms of both average individual and property wealth. That is reflected in per pupil instructional expenditures that are higher than all but five states. Not everyone shares in the wealth, however, as the revenue gap for rural school districts in Massachusetts is the 3rd largest in the U.S.

PRIORITY RANKING

50

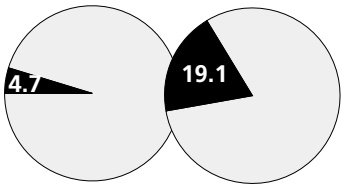
Importance Gauge: Rank 50

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

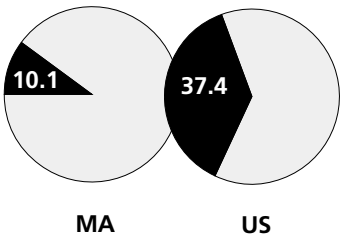
	MA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	38,335	44
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	4.7%	50
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	6.0%	50
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	1.3%	50
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	10.1%	44

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



Poverty Gauge: Rank 49

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	10.1%	49
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	3.5%	49
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	28.4%	49
Rural per capita income	$28,500	48
Rural per pupil property wealth	$398,131	47

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

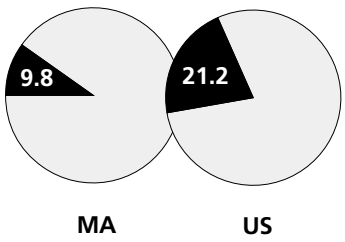
Challenges Gauge: Rank 46

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.6%	25
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.2%	22
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.0%	37
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	9.8%	49
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	10.6%	49

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 42

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$6,251	3
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,517	45
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.6%	39
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.8	42
Median organizational scale (x 100)	5,576	18
Rural four-year graduation rate	78.8%	29
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	527.5	47

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MICHIGAN is typically thought of as an urban state, yet its rural communities are home to schools serving more than 360,000 students—the 5th largest rural student population in the U.S. Poverty levels, on average, are fairly low in the state's rural schools and communities, as are other characteristics and conditions identified as challenges to high levels of student achievement. On policy outcomes, Michigan ranks near the middle on all but one indicator—student-teacher ratios—where it ranks 4th worst in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

39

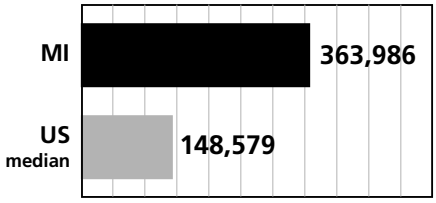
Importance Gauge: Rank 29

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

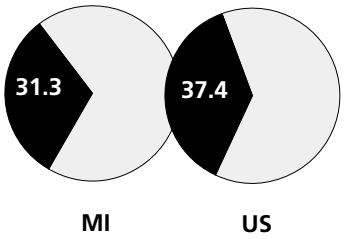
	MI	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	363,986	5
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	22.1%	30
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	29.0%	31
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	9.0%	30
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	22.3%	29

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



Poverty Gauge: Rank 41

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MI	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	31.3%	33
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	7.5%	40
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	39.3%	42
Rural per capita income	$20,685	36
Rural per pupil property wealth	$167,680	35

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

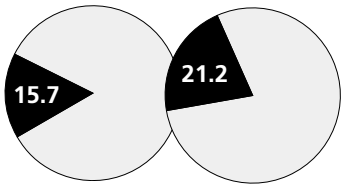
Challenges Gauge: Rank 42

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

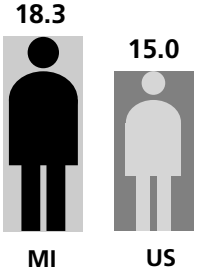
	MI	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.3%	36
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.8%	39
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.9%	31
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	15.7%	30
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.5%	35

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural student-teacher ratio



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 27

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MI	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,246	39
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,188	28
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.3%	31
Rural student-teacher ratio	18.3	4
Median organizational scale (x 100)	4,409	21
Rural four-year graduation rate	70.7%	19
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	511.0	40

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MINNESOTA – A little more than one-fourth of Minnesota's public school students attend rural schools. Poverty levels receive a serious ranking, but other challenges are low in comparison with national averages. In terms of policy outcomes, Minnesota ranks high on the percentage of total current expenditures going toward transportation costs. Above-average size of organizational scale and high student-teacher ratios suggest that the high cost of transportation is at least in part attributable to larger school and district size.

PRIORITY RANKING

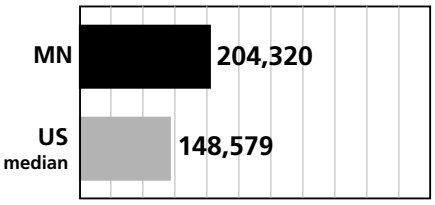
43

Importance Gauge: Rank 28

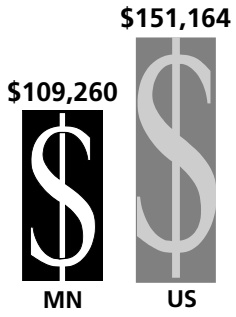
	MN	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	204,320	20
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	25.3%	28
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	40.0%	21
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	14.2%	21
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	20.3%	30

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

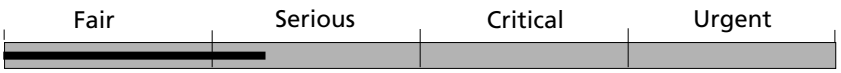
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth



Poverty Gauge: Rank 34



	MN	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	28.4%	35
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	7.1%	42
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	42.1%	37
Rural per capita income	$20,090	29
Rural per pupil property wealth	$109,260	21

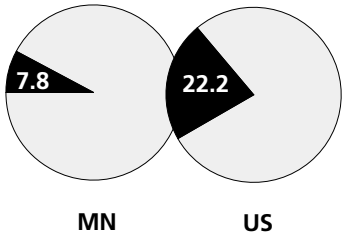
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 46

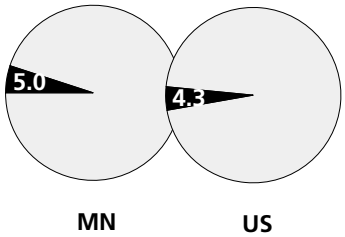
	MN	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.4%	32
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.0%	38
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.8%	32
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	14.7%	36
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.4%	43

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 34

	MN	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,683	31
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,281	32
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.0%	17
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.1	23
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,741	26
Rural four-year graduation rate	82.6%	38
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	510.5	39

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MISSISSIPPI receives the highest overall priority ranking in the U.S. Ranked as the 8th most rural state in our Importance Gauge, rural children and their communities are among the most impoverished in the country and face challenges that exceed those of most other states. Compounding these obstacles are conditions and outcomes directly attributable to policy decisions: Mississippi's students attend large schools and districts, operating with the lowest per pupil instructional expenditures in the nation. Not surprisingly, NAEP scores for rural schools are the 2nd lowest in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

1

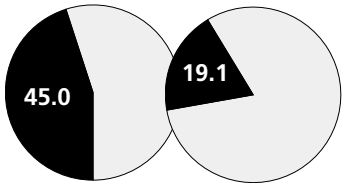
Importance Gauge: Rank 8

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MS	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	220,845	18
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	45.0%	5
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	48.0%	15
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	16.5%	20
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	44.0%	6

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per capita income

Poverty Gauge: Rank 3

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MS	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	65.6%	3
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	19.8%	4
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	55.1%	9
Rural per capita income	$15,242	2
Rural per pupil property wealth	$82,442	8

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

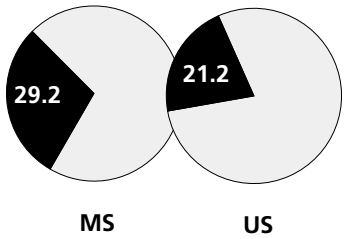
Challenges Gauge: Rank 16

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MS	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.0%	45
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.7%	32
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	44.8%	5
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	29.9%	2
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.4%	25

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 5

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MS	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$841	43
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,083	1
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.4%	27
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.2	14
Median organizational scale (x 100)	11,311	13
Rural four-year graduation rate	61.1%	11
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	469.0	2

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MISSOURI – Missouri's rural student population totals nearly a quarter of a million—the 15th largest in the U.S. Poverty is critically high on all indicators and low property values make local revenue especially scarce for schools. Challenges are serious, with student mobility ranking in the highest quartile and per pupil expenditures for instruction as the 12th lowest in the nation. Still, the academic performance of rural schools is near the middle of the pack, somewhat better than expected under these circumstances.

PRIORITY RANKING

18

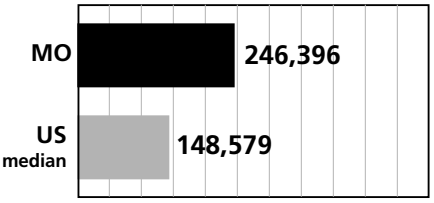
Importance Gauge: Rank 16

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MO	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	246,396	15
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	27.2%	23
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	42.0%	18
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	17.6%	16
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	28.3%	16

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 15

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MO	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	39.0%	19
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.6%	20
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	49.9%	16
Rural per capita income	$17,264	15
Rural per pupil property wealth	$90,817	14

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

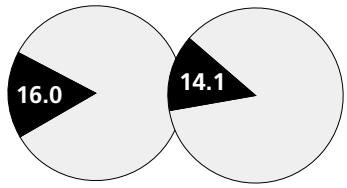
Challenges Gauge: Rank 27

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	MO	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.1%	43
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	15.0%	16
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	5.2%	40
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	22.1%	17
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	16.0%	13

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 26

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	MO	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,335	23
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,672	12
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.6%	23
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.3	35
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,212	34
Rural four-year graduation rate	75.6%	28
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	502.5	25

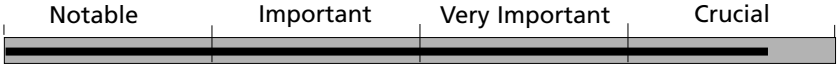
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

MONTANA – With nearly three-fourths of all public schools located in rural areas serving two-fifths of the state's students, public education in Montana is among the most rural in the nation. Poverty is critically high, especially among female-headed households, as is the percentage of minority students and the mobility rate. Non-poverty related challenges are less critical. Student-teacher ratios are low, schools are small, and school governance is decentralized. But while per pupil expenditures for instruction are relatively high overall, there is considerable disparity in the amount of resources made available to local districts.

PRIORITY RANKING

20

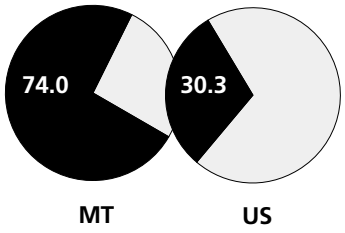
Importance Gauge: Rank 4



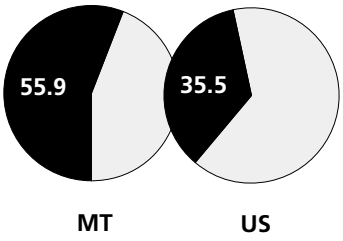
	MT	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	59,206	38
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	39.5%	7
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	74.0%	2
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	32.6%	4
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	44.5%	5

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

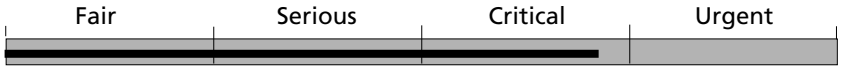
Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line



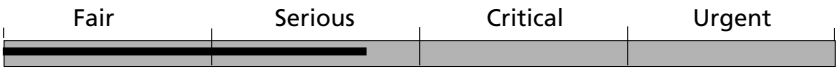
Poverty Gauge: Rank 14



	MT	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	37.1%	21
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.5%	11
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	55.9%	8
Rural per capita income	$17,076	11
Rural per pupil property wealth	$161,236	32

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

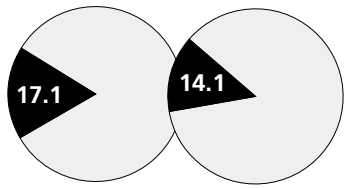
Challenges Gauge: Rank 28



	MT	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.7%	20
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.5%	42
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	20.4%	19
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.5%	41
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	17.1%	19

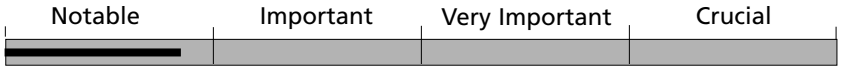
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 39



	MT	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$5,100	5
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,461	36
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.7%	21
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.5	44
Median organizational scale (x 100)	111	49
Rural four-year graduation rate	80.5%	34
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	504.5	27

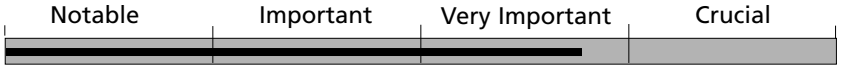
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEBRASKA ranks among the highest in the nation on all measures of the relative importance of rural education. Its many small schools contend with critically high poverty levels due to low per capita income and low per pupil property valuations. Other challenges are serious, especially the percentage of rural special education students. While there are wide disparities in state and local revenue per pupil, the state's small schools produce high rates of spending for instruction, low rates for transportation, excellent student-teacher ratios, very good test scores, and a four-year graduation rate that is second to none. The state would rank higher in terms of overall priority if not for its students' outcomes.

PRIORITY RANKING

33

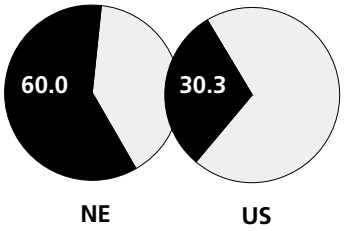
Importance Gauge: Rank 15



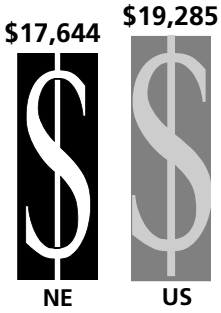
	NE	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	84,138	34
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	29.8%	19
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	60.0%	6
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	27.4%	7
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	27.3%	20

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

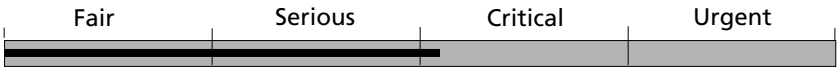
Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per capita income



Poverty Gauge: Rank 24



	NE	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	32.2%	31
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.2%	29
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	45.2%	27
Rural per capita income	$17,644	17
Rural per pupil property wealth	$101,919	19

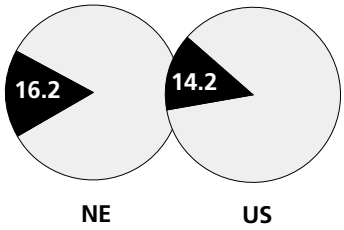
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 32

	NE	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.5%	29
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.2%	11
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.8%	33
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.5%	41
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.7%	34

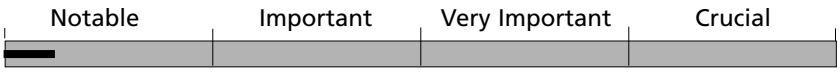
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 47



	NE	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,271	16
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,592	37
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.1%	45
Rural student-teacher ratio	11.7	47
Median organizational scale (x 100)	211	46
Rural four-year graduation rate	90.5%	50
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	505.0	28

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEVADA – Most of Nevada's population lives in cities, and only 7.4% of public school students attend schools located in rural areas. Poverty levels are generally near the middle of national rankings. Rankings on non-poverty challenges, on the other hand, are generally near the top: the state has the highest rate of student mobility and the 7th highest rate of English Language Learners. NAEP scores are among the lowest in the U.S., and the distribution of funds among rural school districts within the state is far from even. This is a state whose rural students seem to be invisible.

PRIORITY RANKING

29

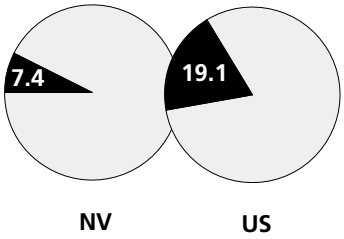
Importance Gauge: Rank 48

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

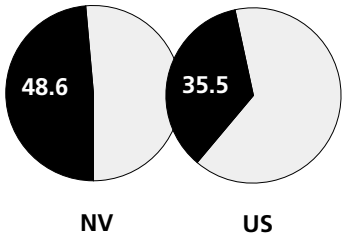
	NV	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	26,584	46
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	7.4%	48
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	19.0%	40
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	3.2%	45
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	10.8%	42

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural female-headed households with pre-school-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 31

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	NV	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	34.6%	27
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	9.4%	31
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	48.6%	19
Rural per capita income	$24,349	44
Rural per pupil property wealth	$189,514	37

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

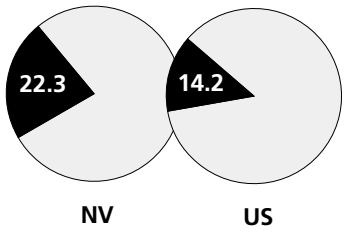
Challenges Gauge: Rank 5

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	NV	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	4.0%	7
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.4%	20
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	28.4%	16
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	16.1%	28
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	22.3%	1

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 17

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	NV	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$5,725	4
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,263	30
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.6%	25
Rural student-teacher ratio	17.6	7
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,110	38
Rural four-year graduation rate	82.1%	37
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	485.0	9

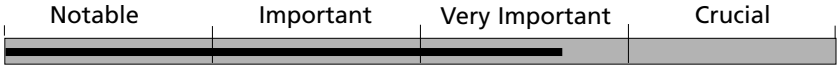
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEW HAMPSHIRE – A predominantly rural state, New Hampshire ranks in the second quartile on our Importance Gauge. Rural areas of the state are comparatively affluent, and face less extensive challenges than most other states. However, the distribution of operating revenue among districts is nearly the most inequitable in the U.S, and while NAEP scores are among the highest in the nation, four-year graduation rates are below the median.

PRIORITY RANKING

42

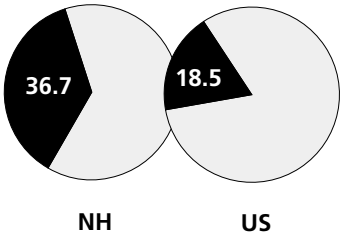
Importance Gauge: Rank 16



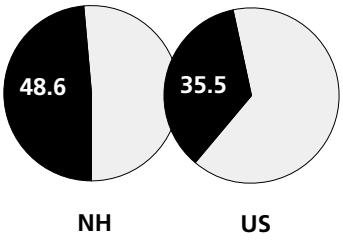
	NH	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	68,642	36
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	33.1%	13
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	50.0%	11
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	17.6%	17
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	36.7%	11

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

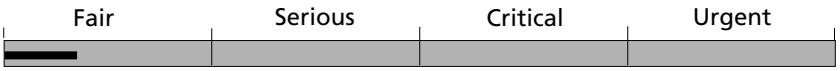
Percentage of state funding to rural schools



Percentage of rural female-headed households with pre-school-age children living below the federal poverty line



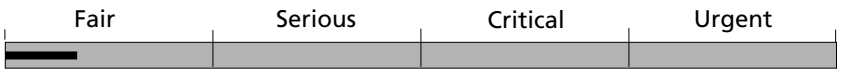
Poverty Gauge: Rank 45



	NH	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	16.2%	46
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	4.8%	46
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	36.2%	43
Rural per capita income	$24,055	43
Rural per pupil property wealth	$258,839	43

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

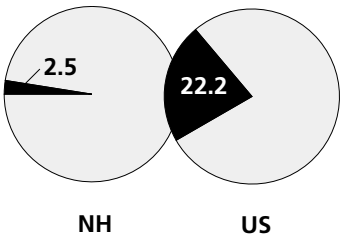
Challenges Gauge: Rank 45



	NH	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.2%	38
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.5%	18
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	2.5%	49
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	11.6%	47
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.3%	26

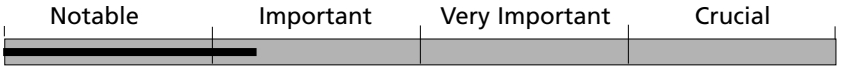
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 34



	NH	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$6,279	2
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,719	39
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.1%	34
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.9	41
Median organizational scale (x 100)	2,011	24
Rural four-year graduation rate	71.1%	22
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	515.5	44

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEW JERSEY is among the nation's least rural states, and its rural areas are among the most affluent in terms of both income and property wealth. Still, New Jersey's rural schools face serious challenges, including the nation's 7th largest percentage of special education students and a sizable population of English Language Learners. In terms of policy outcomes, rural districts vary widely in the level of state and local revenue available for school operations, and pay more toward transportation than do most other states—suggesting that pockets of rural New Jersey are not participating in the prosperity.

PRIORITY RANKING

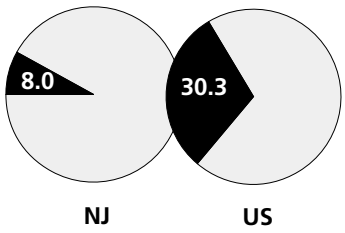
47

Importance Gauge: Rank 47

	NJ	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	102,034	31
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	7.7%	47
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	8.0%	49
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	1.6%	49
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	12.9%	40

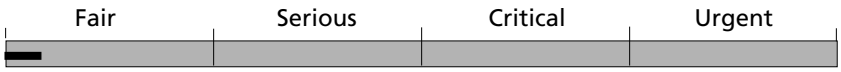
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 48



	NJ	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	13.5%	47
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	4.1%	47
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	30.6%	48
Rural per capita income	$30,905	49
Rural per pupil property wealth	$423,989	49

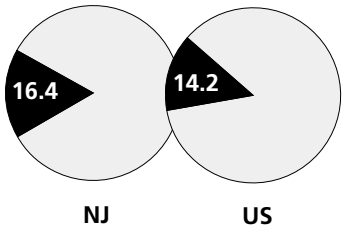
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 29

	NJ	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.4%	15
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.4%	7
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	15.1%	25
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	12.7%	44
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	10.8%	47

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 38

	NJ	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$4,333	9
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,372	44
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.2%	12
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.5	34
Median organizational scale (x 100)	4,090	23
Rural four-year graduation rate	83.0%	40
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	521.5	46

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEW MEXICO has the 2nd highest rural education priority ranking among the 50 states, despite ranking below the median on the Importance Gauge. The reason: It ranks first on both the poverty and other challenges gauges. New Mexico's poverty ranking is in the highest quartile on all five indicators, and in the top four in four indicators. Nearly 1 in 4 families of school-age children live in poverty. Other challenges are also the most urgent in the U.S., particularly with regard to special education, minority, and English Language Learner student populations. Exacerbating these challenges are inequitable distributions of state education funds and high transportation costs. It's not surprising that rural NAEP scores are the lowest in the U.S.

PRIORITY RANKING

2

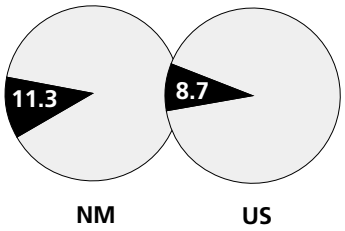
Importance Gauge: Rank 33

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

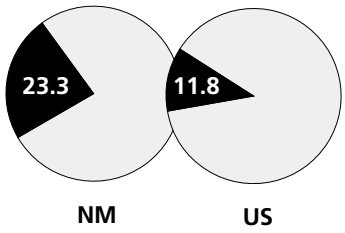
	NM	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	56,180	40
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	18.3%	33
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	35.0%	26
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	11.3%	25
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	16.4%	33

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of all students attending small rural schools



Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 1

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	NM	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	67.3%	2
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	23.3%	1
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	53.5%	11
Rural per capita income	$15,413	3
Rural per pupil property wealth	$68,566	4

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

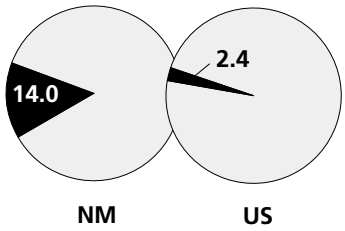
Challenges Gauge: Rank 1

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

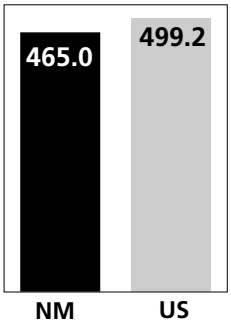
	NM	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	14.0%	1
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	18.7%	2
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	70.6%	2
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	24.5%	12
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.7%	16

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural population who speak English "less than very well"



Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 6

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	NM	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$4,847	6
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,837	17
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.7%	4
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.2	30
Median organizational scale (x 100)	541	43
Rural four-year graduation rate	63.5%	12
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	465.0	1

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NEW YORK is among the nation's least rural states, yet its rural schools still serve more than 330,000 students. Poverty rankings are consistently in the 3rd quartile. Non-poverty challenges are more serious, with the state ranking near the middle on the percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma and the percentage of students learning English. Policy outcomes are more troubling than these challenges justify, with four-year graduation rates, organizational scale, transportation spending, and overall revenue inequity all scoring below the national median.

PRIORITY RANKING

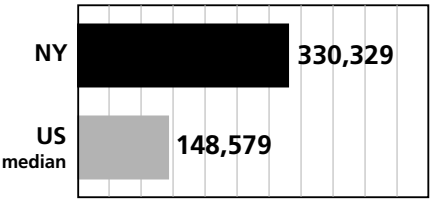
39

Importance Gauge: Rank 38

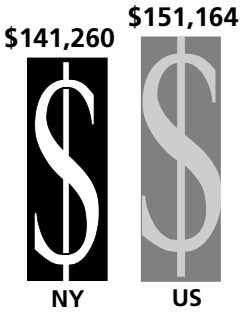
	NY	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	330,329	7
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	11.9%	42
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	18.0%	41
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	4.9%	39
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	14.0%	39

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

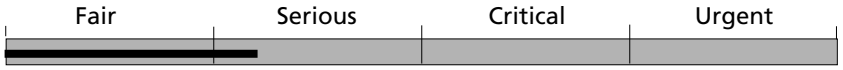
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth



Poverty Gauge: Rank 35



	NY	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	27.8%	36
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	9.3%	32
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	42.6%	34
Rural per capita income	$20,936	37
Rural per pupil property wealth	$141,260	26

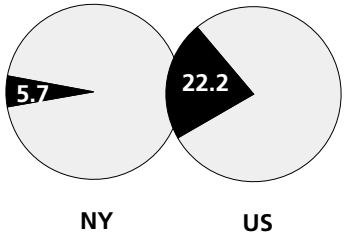
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 35

	NY	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.7%	20
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.9%	28
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	5.7%	39
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	16.3%	27
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.0%	39

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 31

	NY	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,666	12
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$6,670	49
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.2%	13
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.3	36
Median organizational scale (x 100)	4,681	20
Rural four-year graduation rate	72.0%	24
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	516.0	45

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NORTH CAROLINA is one of only two states to rank in the highest quartile on both total rural student population and percentage rural population. Nearly 40% of all North Carolina's students attend rural schools; however, less than 10% attend small rural schools and overall organizational scale of rural schooling is the largest in the nation. While poverty ranks only near or below the median for the nation, challenges and policy outcomes are much worse, with a four-year graduation rate among the lowest in the nation and percent spent on instruction, NAEP scores, and student-teacher ratios all worse than national medians.

PRIORITY RANKING

9

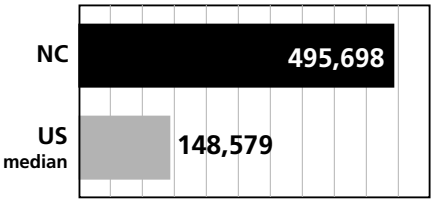
Importance Gauge: Rank 10

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

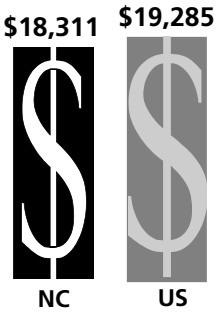
	NC	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	495,698	2
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	37.9%	10
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	42.0%	18
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	9.5%	28
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	43.4%	8

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per capita income



Poverty Gauge: Rank 27

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	NC	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	33.3%	30
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.4%	22
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	44.4%	31
Rural per capita income	$18,311	19
Rural per pupil property wealth	$144,747	27

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

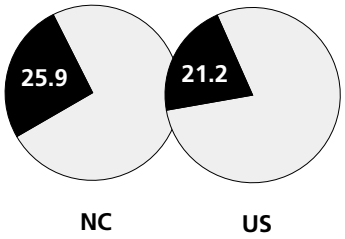
Challenges Gauge: Rank 7

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

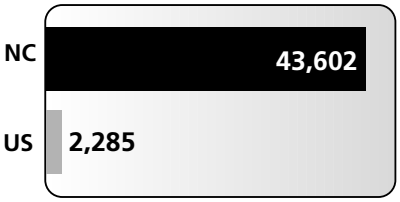
	NC	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.4%	15
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.9%	17
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	32.9%	11
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	25.9%	11
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.9%	21

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 17

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	NC	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,122	27
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,959	21
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	2.7%	47
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.9	24
Median organizational scale (x 100)	43,602	1
Rural four-year graduation rate	58.3%	6
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	502.0	24

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

NORTH DAKOTA ranks in the highest quartile of states on both the importance and poverty gauges. Nearly three out of four schools are located in rural areas, and more than 41% of all students attend small rural schools. Poverty is particularly acute among female-headed households with small children, and low property values undermine local tax efforts. The state's cumulative ranking is just below the median, however, largely because of decent policy outcomes—overall organizational scale is small, student-teacher ratios are low, and graduation rates are high. Of concern: high proportions of spending on transportation, low per pupil expenditures for instruction, and inequity in state and local funding to rural schools.

PRIORITY RANKING

21

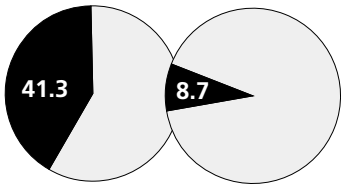
Importance Gauge: Rank 6

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	ND	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	46,725	43
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	45.0%	4
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	72.0%	3
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	41.3%	1
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	43.5%	7

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of all students attending small rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 10

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	ND	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	34.2%	28
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	13.1%	17
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	60.7%	2
Rural per capita income	$16,555	9
Rural per pupil property wealth	$57,165	1

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

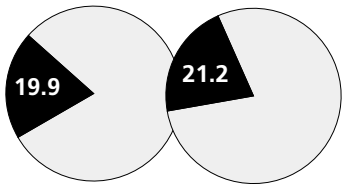
Challenges Gauge: Rank 39

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

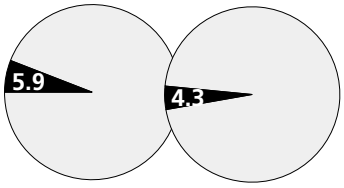
	ND	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.6%	25
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.3%	44
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	14.0%	28
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	19.9%	19
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	10.8%	47

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 34

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	ND	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,398	14
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,729	14
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.9%	3
Rural student-teacher ratio	11.5	49
Median organizational scale (x 100)	196	47
Rural four-year graduation rate	86.5%	48
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	507.5	31

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

OHIO has the 3rd largest population of rural students in the nation at nearly 435,000. Schools serving these students contend with only moderate levels of poverty and relatively few other challenges. Ohio's rankings on policy outcomes are disappointingly low relative to the challenges faced by its schools, however. An overall ranking of 16 on the Policy Outcomes Gauge results from having the 2nd lowest level of per pupil instructional spending nationally, high student-teacher ratios, and a large organizational scale.

PRIORITY RANKING

33

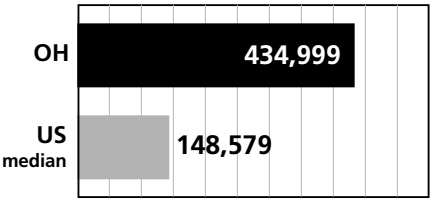
Importance Gauge: Rank 22

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

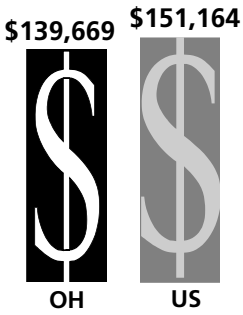
	OH	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	434,999	3
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	24.3%	29
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	29.0%	31
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	9.8%	27
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	27.7%	19

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth



Poverty Gauge: Rank 37

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	OH	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	23.7%	42
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.2%	37
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	42.0%	38
Rural per capita income	$20,017	27
Rural per pupil property wealth	$139,669	25

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

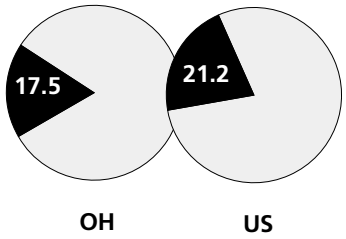
Challenges Gauge: Rank 43

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	OH	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.7%	20
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	11.8%	47
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	3.9%	43
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	17.5%	23
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.6%	41

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 16

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	OH	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,071	28
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,439	2
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.5%	26
Rural student-teacher ratio	16.9	11
Median organizational scale (x 100)	5,283	19
Rural four-year graduation rate	80.1%	32
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	507.5	31

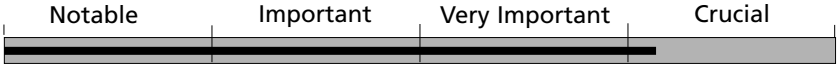
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

OKLAHOMA – With an overall priority ranking of 6, Oklahoma ranks in the top quartile on importance, poverty, and challenges gauges, and on some policy outcome indicators. More than half of all public schools are located in rural areas, and nearly one-fourth of all students attend small rural schools. Well over half of all rural students qualify for subsidized meals, and rural property values are the 2nd lowest in the U.S. Minority enrollment in rural schools is sizable, as is the percentage of special education students and the rate of student mobility. Compounding these and other challenges are per pupil instructional expenditures and NAEP test scores that are among the lowest in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

6

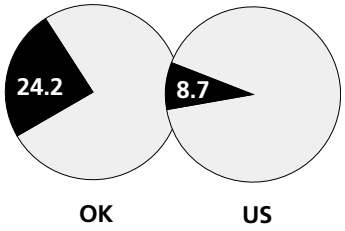
Importance Gauge: Rank 11



	OK	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	197,157	21
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	31.7%	15
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	51.0%	10
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	24.2%	9
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	28.0%	17

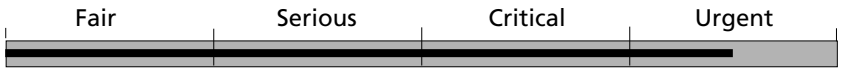
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of all students attending small rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth

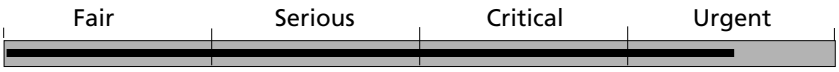
Poverty Gauge: Rank 6



	OK	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	57.7%	5
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.3%	12
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	53.3%	13
Rural per capita income	$16,256	7
Rural per pupil property wealth	$57,454	2

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

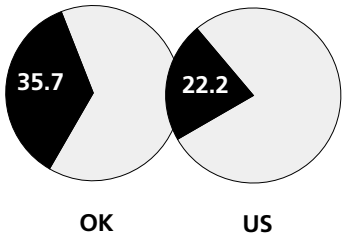
Challenges Gauge: Rank 11



	OK	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.5%	29
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	15.3%	14
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	35.7%	8
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	22.0%	18
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.9%	14

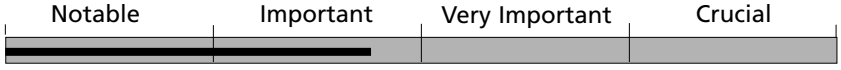
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 28



	OK	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,822	29
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,532	6
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.5%	41
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.4	29
Median organizational scale (x 100)	578	42
Rural four-year graduation rate	79.0%	30
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	485.5	10

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

OREGON – Oregon's rural schools make up nearly a third of all public schools in the state, and serve almost 90,000 students. Poverty and other challenges are at critical levels, with high rankings that are consistent across many indicators in each gauge. The population of English Language Learners is high, as are subsidized meal rates and poverty rates among female-headed households with preschoolers. Policy outcomes suggest the need for immediate attention: inequity in state and local revenue per pupil is among the nation's most severe, the proportion of spending on transportation is higher than all but five states, and student-teacher ratios are the 3rd highest in the country.

PRIORITY RANKING

18

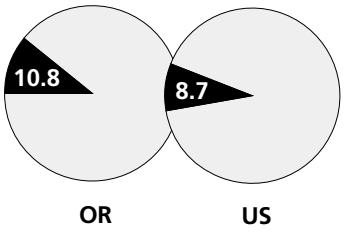
Importance Gauge: Rank 34

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	OR	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	88,869	32
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	16.5%	34
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	31.0%	29
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	10.8%	26
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	15.1%	37

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of all students attending small rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals

Poverty Gauge: Rank 24

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	OR	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	41.7%	17
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.5%	26
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	49.2%	17
Rural per capita income	$21,033	39
Rural per pupil property wealth	$136,519	24

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

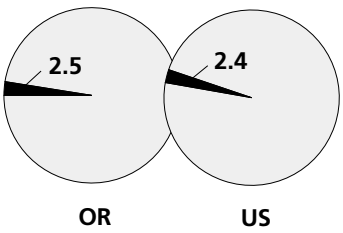
Challenges Gauge: Rank 19

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	OR	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.5%	14
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.9%	30
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	16.0%	23
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	15.0%	33
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.8%	22

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural population who speak English "less than very well"



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 7

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	OR	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$7,391	1
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,449	35
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.5%	6
Rural student-teacher ratio	18.5	3
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,140	37
Rural four-year graduation rate	71.0%	21
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	499.0	22

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

PENNSYLVANIA – Pennsylvania's rural schools provide educational services to more than 350,000 children, the 6th largest rural school population in the nation, and the state ranks below the median on three gauges (importance, poverty, and challenges). Pennsylvania's rural population is the nation's most stable, state and local revenue is shared fairly equally among rural districts, and per pupil instructional spending is well above the national median. In terms of other policy outcomes, however, the state fares less well: transportation costs as a percentage of total spending are the 5th highest among states, overall organizational scale is the 15th largest in the nation, and rural student-teacher ratios are well above the national median.

PRIORITY RANKING

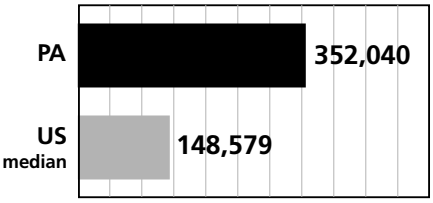
36

Importance Gauge: Rank 30

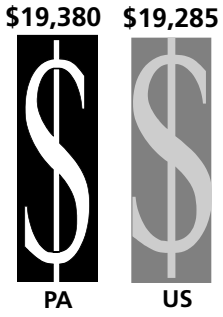
	PA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	352,040	6
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	20.1%	32
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	25.0%	34
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	6.8%	35
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	24.4%	26

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

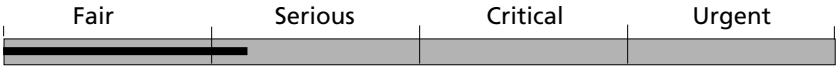
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per capita income



Poverty Gauge: Rank 36



	PA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	24.6%	39
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.8%	34
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	43.3%	33
Rural per capita income	$19,380	25
Rural per pupil property wealth	$173,406	36

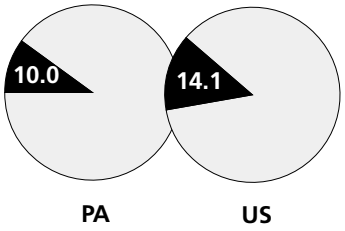
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Challenges Gauge: Rank 41

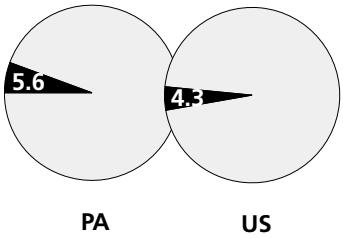
	PA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.7%	20
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.2%	36
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	4.6%	41
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	18.8%	21
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	10.0%	50

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

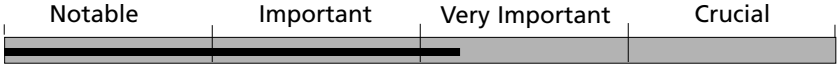
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 23



	PA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,504	34
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,389	33
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.6%	5
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.6	20
Median organizational scale (x 100)	7,754	15
Rural four-year graduation rate	81.4%	36
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	506.5	29

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

RHODE ISLAND is among our least rural states, and rural communities are relatively affluent, with challenges that are low compared with other states. An exception is the state's distinction as having the nation's highest percentage of rural students qualifying for special education services. Rhode Island's overall policy outcomes are just slightly below the median, but a few outcome indicators rank well above median, including the percentage of spending on transportation (7th in the nation), the organizational scale of rural schooling (12th largest nationally), and revenue inequity among rural school districts in the state (18th nationally).

PRIORITY RANKING

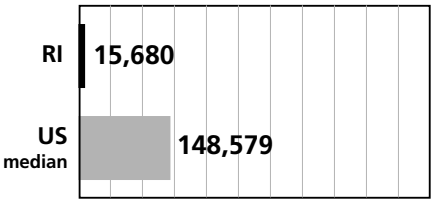
48

Importance Gauge: Rank 49

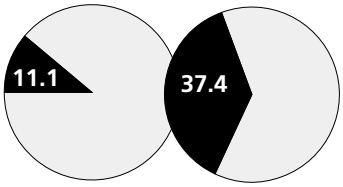
	RI	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	15,680	50
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	10.1%	46
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	10.0%	48
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	2.7%	46
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	9.6%	45

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

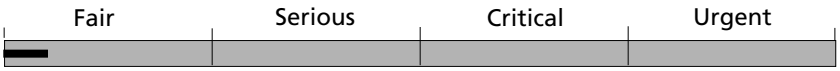
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



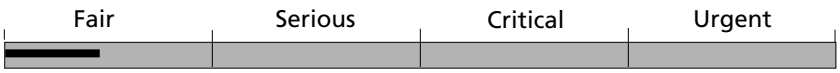
Poverty Gauge: Rank 47



	RI	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	11.1%	48
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	3.8%	48
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	35.6%	46
Rural per capita income	$26,925	47
Rural per pupil property wealth	$287,028	46

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

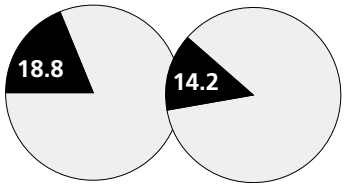
Challenges Gauge: Rank 44



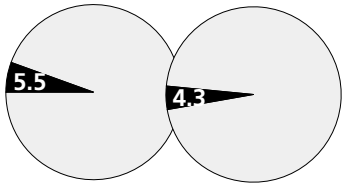
	RI	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.2%	38
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	18.8%	1
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	3.1%	46
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	12.5%	45
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.1%	46

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

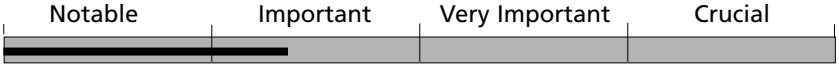
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 33



	RI	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,833	18
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,737	47
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	5.5%	7
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.9	33
Median organizational scale (x 100)	11,858	12
Rural four-year graduation rate	84.6%	45
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	512.5	43

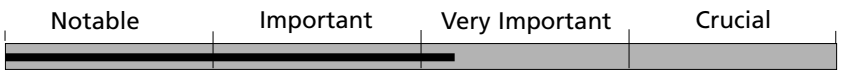
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

SOUTH CAROLINA – With a sizable rural student population, high poverty, substantial challenges, and outcomes that are among the worst in the nation, South Carolina ranks as the 7th rural education priority state. More than one-third of all public schools are located in rural areas, more than half of all rural students qualify for subsidized meals, and almost half of all entering 9th graders earn a high school diploma in four years. Minority student enrollment is among the highest in the country at 42%, and the percentage of students qualifying for special education services is also high. More than 1 in 4 adults lack a high school diploma.

PRIORITY RANKING

7

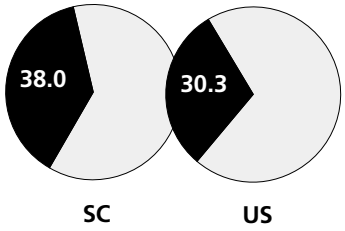
Importance Gauge: Rank 23



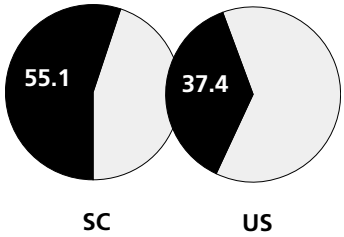
	SC	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	217,944	19
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	31.6%	16
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	38.0%	23
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	9.4%	29
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	25.7%	24

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

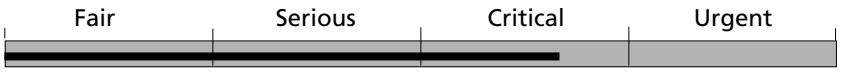
Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



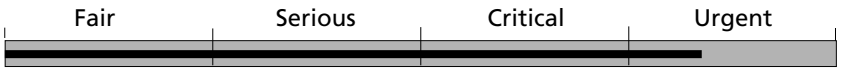
Poverty Gauge: Rank 17



	SC	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	55.1%	7
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.3%	12
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	44.9%	28
Rural per capita income	$17,106	13
Rural per pupil property wealth	$149,306	29

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

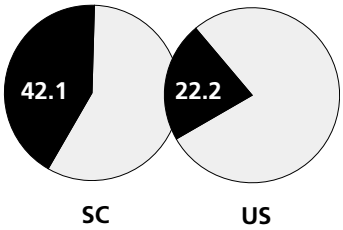
Challenges Gauge: Rank 7



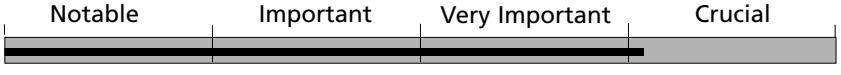
	SC	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.4%	32
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.6%	5
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	42.1%	7
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	28.2%	7
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	14.5%	24

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



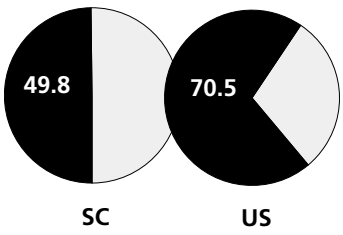
Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 12



	SC	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,377	37
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,970	23
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.4%	43
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.2	21
Median organizational scale (x 100)	25,453	5
Rural four-year graduation rate	49.8%	1
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	487.0	11

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Rural four-year graduation rate

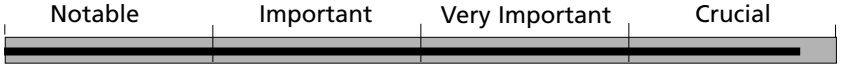


SOUTH DAKOTA is one of the most rural states: percentages of students in rural schools, schools in rural areas, and students attending small rural schools are all in the top three nationally. Fifty cents of every state dollar spent on education goes to rural schools. Poverty is prevalent, but other challenges are moderate, except for the percentage of English Language Learners (15th). South Dakota has positive policy outcomes, with low student-teacher ratios, a small organizational scale, high graduation rates, and a relatively equitable distribution of revenue among rural schools (although NAEP scores and instructional spending levels are mediocre).

PRIORITY RANKING

17

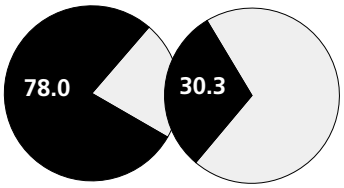
Importance Gauge: Rank 2



	SD	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	57,380	39
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	45.2%	3
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	78.0%	1
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	39.1%	2
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	50.3%	3

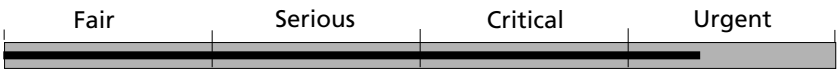
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

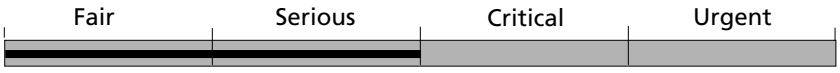
Poverty Gauge: Rank 8



	SD	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	36.6%	23
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	15.7%	9
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	56.7%	6
Rural per capita income	$16,272	8
Rural per pupil property wealth	$64,806	3

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

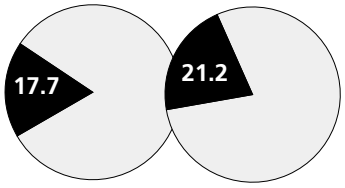
Challenges Gauge: Rank 25



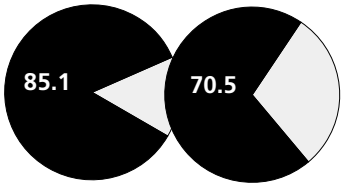
	SD	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	2.4%	15
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.6%	33
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	15.5%	24
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	17.7%	22
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	13.4%	31

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

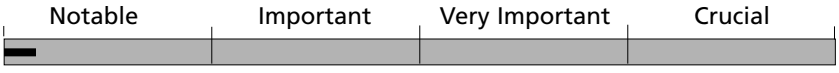
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural four-year graduation rate



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 48



	SD	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,350	38
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,965	22
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.6%	38
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.2	46
Median organizational scale (x 100)	194	48
Rural four-year graduation rate	85.1%	46
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	508.0	33

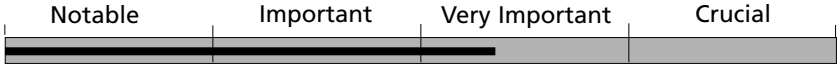
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

TENNESSEE ranks in the top quartile on policy outcomes and in the second quartile on the three other gauges, resulting in a priority ranking of 13. It serves more rural students than all but 11 states, with nearly half of those students eligible for subsidized meals. Rural per capita income is well below the national median, and adult educational attainment is the 3rd lowest in the U.S. Compounding these challenges, rural spending on instruction is among the nation's lowest, and it's most likely low across the state, since state and local revenue is equally distributed among rural schools. Schools and districts are large, and graduation rates and NAEP scores are below national medians.

PRIORITY RANKING

13

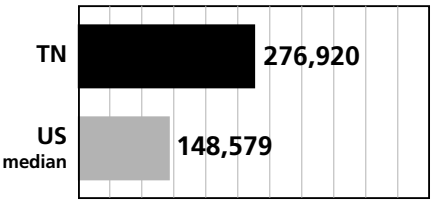
Importance Gauge: Rank 20



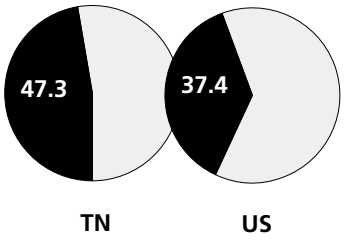
	TN	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	276,920	12
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	30.7%	17
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	36.0%	24
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	12.2%	23
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	24.7%	25

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

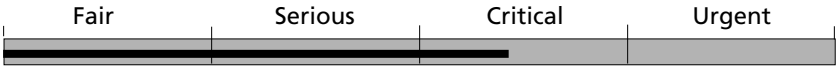
Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals



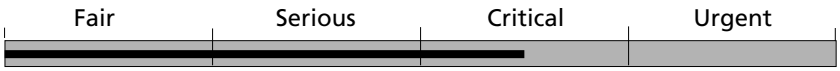
Poverty Gauge: Rank 19



	TN	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	47.3%	12
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	12.8%	19
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	44.8%	29
Rural per capita income	$17,667	18
Rural per pupil property wealth	$118,476	22

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

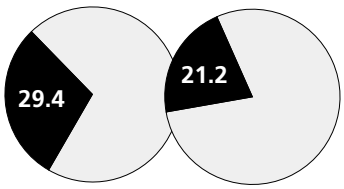
Challenges Gauge: Rank 18



	TN	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	0.9%	48
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	16.3%	8
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	7.1%	35
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	29.4%	3
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.1%	19

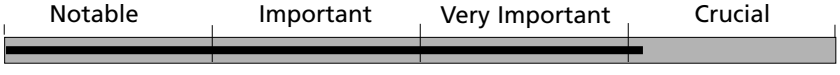
*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 12



	TN	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$608	48
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,455	3
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	3.5%	40
Rural student-teacher ratio	15.9	18
Median organizational scale (x 100)	13,394	10
Rural four-year graduation rate	59.6%	8
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	489.0	14

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

TEXAS – More children attend rural schools in Texas than in any other state, yet its rural enrollment comprises less than 13% of the total state student population. Poverty is a critical factor in rural education in Texas, with high rates of poverty among rural families and low property values in rural communities. Other challenges include large numbers of English Language Learners and minority enrollments, a high rate of adults without high school diplomas, and high mobility among rural households. Transportation costs are proportionally low, and organizational scale is below the median, but revenue distribution is relatively inequitable and rural NAEP scores are the 16th lowest in the nation.

PRIORITY RANKING

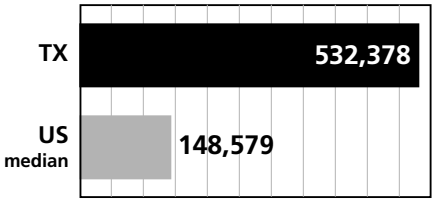
16

Importance Gauge: Rank 32

	TX	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	532,378	1
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	12.8%	39
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	23.0%	37
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	5.9%	36
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	15.4%	36

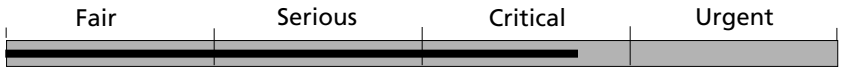
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth

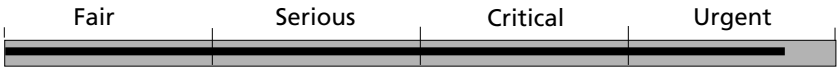
Poverty Gauge: Rank 16



	TX	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	41.6%	18
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	13.6%	14
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	46.8%	25
Rural per capita income	$18,471	21
Rural per pupil property wealth	$81,741	7

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

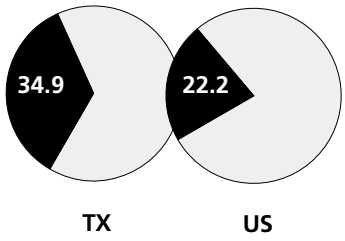
Challenges Gauge: Rank 3



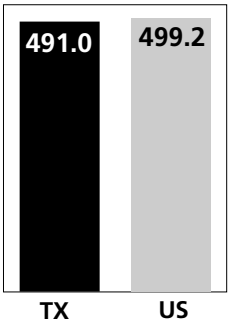
	TX	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	6.5%	5
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.4%	19
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	34.9%	10
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	24.0%	14
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	17.1%	9

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

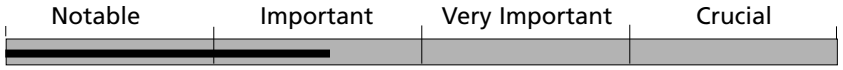
Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 30



	TX	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$2,763	19
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,265	31
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	2.7%	46
Rural student-teacher ratio	13.1	37
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,475	28
Rural four-year graduation rate	70.9%	20
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	491.0	16

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

UTAH – Utah's population lives mostly in cities, and the rural student population is among the smallest in the nation, both relatively and absolutely. Poverty is a critical issue for the schools serving nearly 50,000 rural students, with low per capita income levels and low per pupil property values in the state's rural communities. A relatively large population of English Language Learners and high student mobility present additional challenges. Per pupil spending for instruction is among the lowest in the nation, and the revenue gap between rural schools is among the largest. Only one state has a larger student-teacher ratio in rural schools, and NAEP scores are below the national median.

PRIORITY RANKING

25

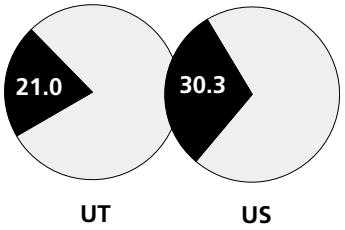
Importance Gauge: Rank 46

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	UT	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	48,037	42
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	10.1%	45
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	21.0%	38
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	4.6%	40
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	8.2%	47

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 18

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	UT	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	38.5%	20
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.0%	30
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	48.0%	23
Rural per capita income	$17,085	12
Rural per pupil property wealth	$90,652	13

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

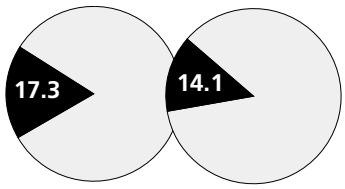
Challenges Gauge: Rank 19

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

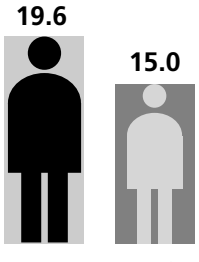
	UT	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	3.0%	12
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.6%	33
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	11.8%	29
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.6%	40
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	17.3%	8

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months



Rural student-teacher ratio



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 11

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	UT	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,604	13
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$3,695	13
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.7%	20
Rural student-teacher ratio	19.6	2
Median organizational scale (x 100)	4,228	22
Rural four-year graduation rate	86.3%	47
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	498.0	19

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

VERMONT – Crucially important, Vermont nevertheless ranks low overall on the Rural Education Priority Gauge because it has relatively low poverty and other challenges, and has positive overall outcomes. Rural Vermont is relatively affluent in comparison with most other states, with low poverty rates, high median income, and high per pupil property values. Non-poverty challenges faced by the state's rural schools are, on average, far less extensive than in most states. In addition, outcome indicators suggest that Vermont's rural schools and districts are reasonably sized, have low student-teacher ratios, and have relatively high levels of spending on instruction.

PRIORITY RANKING

39

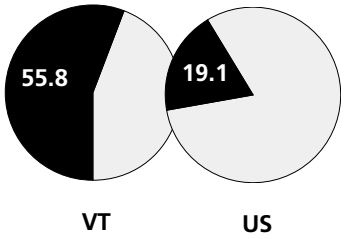
Importance Gauge: Rank 3

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

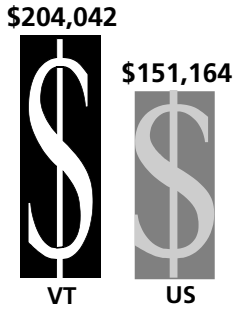
	VT	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	54,925	41
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	55.8%	1
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	72.0%	3
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	39.1%	3
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	61.2%	1

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools



Rural per pupil property wealth



Poverty Gauge: Rank 38

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	VT	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	25.3%	37
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	8.4%	36
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	48.2%	21
Rural per capita income	$21,205	40
Rural per pupil property wealth	$204,042	40

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

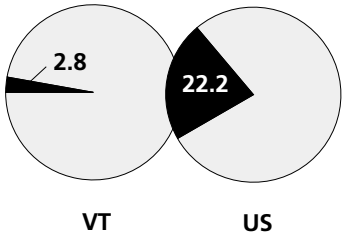
Challenges Gauge: Rank 49

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

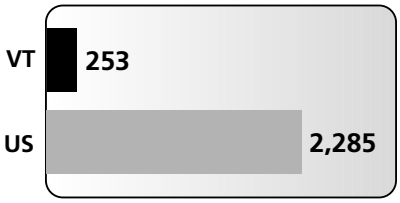
	VT	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.1%	43
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.0%	26
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	2.8%	47
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	13.4%	43
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	13.9%	29

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who are minorities



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 49

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	VT	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	NA	NA
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,130	43
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.2%	32
Rural student-teacher ratio	11.5	48
Median organizational scale (x 100)	253	45
Rural four-year graduation rate	80.5%	33
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	NA	NA

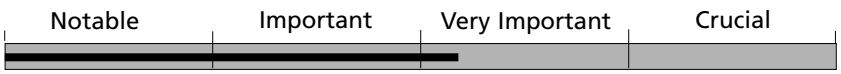
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

VIRGINIA – With the 9th largest rural enrollment in the U.S. (300,000 plus) and more than one-fourth of all students attending schools located in rural areas, Virginia ranks in the 2nd quartile of our Importance Gauge. Poverty levels, on average, are below the national median. Other challenges should be of far greater concern for rural educators and policymakers, however: Virginia ranks in the top 20 in terms of urgency on adult educational attainment rates, percentage of special education enrollment, and percentage of minority enrollment. Schools and districts are large, the cost of pupil transportation in proportion to other expenditures is high, and fewer than 7 in 10 students graduate in four years

PRIORITY RANKING

27

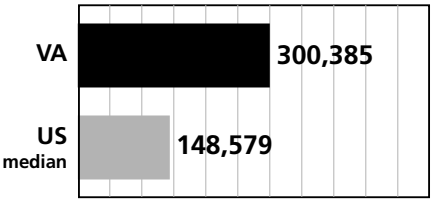
Importance Gauge: Rank 23



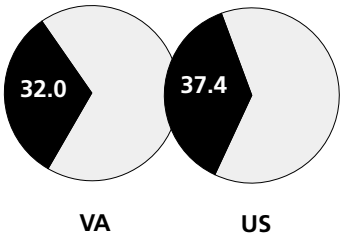
	VA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	300,385	9
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	25.9%	26
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	33.0%	27
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	7.4%	34
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	28.4%	15

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals

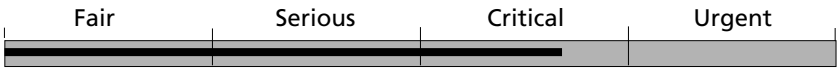


Poverty Gauge: Rank 33

	VA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	32.0%	32
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.5%	26
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	41.0%	40
Rural per capita income	$20,415	31
Rural per pupil property wealth	$162,733	33

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

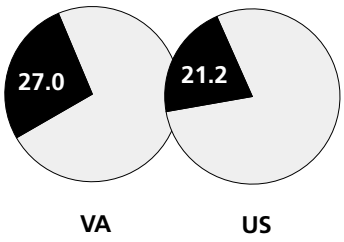
Challenges Gauge: Rank 17



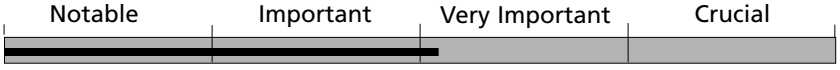
	VA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.2%	38
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	15.1%	15
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	24.2%	17
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	27.0%	9
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.9%	33

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



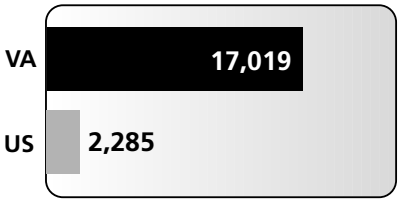
Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 24



	VA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,215	40
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,186	27
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.9%	18
Rural student-teacher ratio	12.3	45
Median organizational scale (x 100)	17,019	8
Rural four-year graduation rate	69.0%	16
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	501.5	23

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Median organizational scale

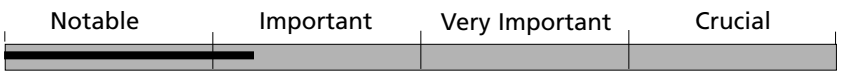


WASHINGTON – One in four of Washington's schools are located in rural areas, serving a total enrollment that is just below the national median. Poverty is a serious concern, particularly among female-headed households with preschool-age children. The percentage of Washington's rural students who are English Language Learners is higher than all but eight other states. Rural student-teacher ratios are higher than in 44 other states, and the amount of state and local revenue available to rural school districts varies dramatically from district to district.

PRIORITY RANKING

30

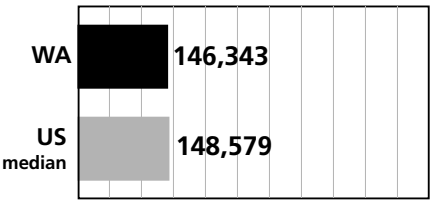
Importance Gauge: Rank 35



	WA	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	146,343	26
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	15.0%	36
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	25.0%	34
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	7.5%	33
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	17.4%	31

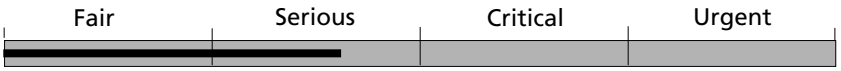
*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of students enrolled in rural schools



Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals

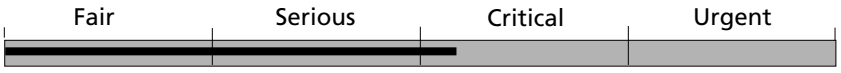
Poverty Gauge: Rank 30



	WA	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	37.0%	22
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	10.9%	25
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	48.6%	19
Rural per capita income	$20,985	38
Rural per pupil property wealth	$194,171	38

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

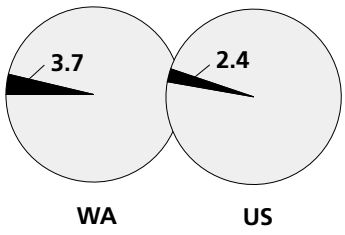
Challenges Gauge: Rank 23



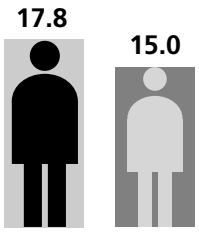
	WA	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	3.7%	9
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	12.4%	43
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	18.5%	21
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	14.9%	34
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	15.5%	17

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

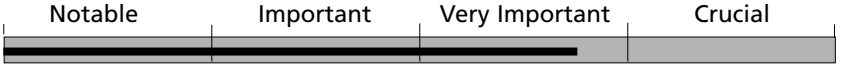
Percentage of rural population who speak English "less than very well"



Rural student-teacher ratio



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 15



	WA	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$3,812	11
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,149	26
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.0%	35
Rural student-teacher ratio	17.8	6
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,610	27
Rural four-year graduation rate	71.5%	23
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	498.5	20

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

WEST VIRGINIA is among the most rural states in the nation, and its rural areas are among the most impoverished. Rural per capita income is the lowest in the U.S., more than half of all rural students qualify for subsidized meals, and 1 in 5 families live below the federal poverty line. West Virginia's special education population is large, and educational attainment among rural adults is low. Fairly high spending on instruction is overshadowed by the fact that West Virginia spends more of its rural education dollar on transportation than any other state, has mediocre graduation rates, and rural NAEP scores among the nation's lowest.

PRIORITY RANKING

11

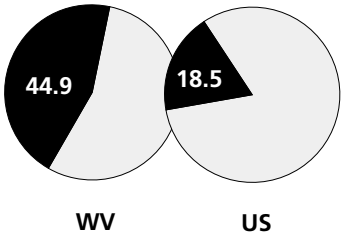
Importance Gauge: Rank 5

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	WV	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	119,776	28
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	42.6%	6
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	50.0%	11
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	24.6%	8
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	44.9%	4

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of state funding to rural schools



Rural per capita income

Poverty Gauge: Rank 5

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	WV	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	55.5%	6
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	21.9%	3
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	63.9%	1
Rural per capita income	$15,177	1
Rural per pupil property wealth	$95,669	16

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

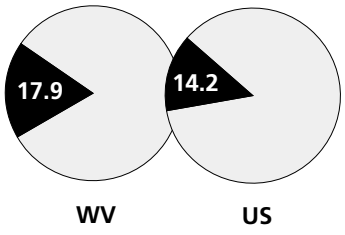
Challenges Gauge: Rank 31

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

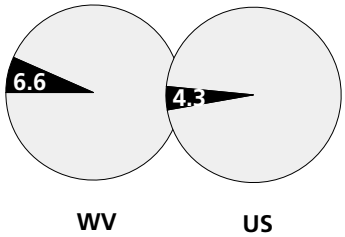
	WV	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	0.6%	50
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	17.9%	4
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	2.7%	48
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	28.6%	6
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	12.2%	38

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural students who receive special education services



Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 21

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	WV	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,020	42
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,641	38
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	6.6%	1
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.4	27
Median organizational scale (x 100)	12,468	11
Rural four-year graduation rate	73.3%	26
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	487.5	12

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

WISCONSIN has a sizable rural population, with nearly 40% of its schools located in rural areas, serving more than one-third of the state's students. Rural schools and communities in Wisconsin are relatively affluent and contend with substantially fewer challenges in comparison with most other states. Similarly, outcome indicators suggest little in the way of priority needs, with the state scoring at or above the median on all outcome indicators. Student-teacher ratios, organizational scale, and proportional spending on transportation all compare favorably with other states.

PRIORITY RANKING

46

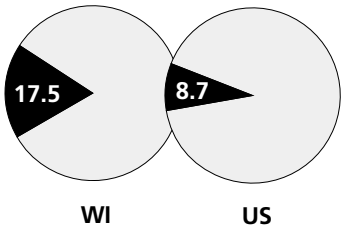
Importance Gauge: Rank 21

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

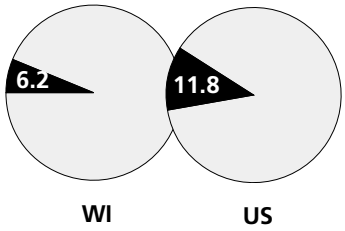
	WI	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	235,564	17
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	27.5%	22
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	39.0%	22
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	17.5%	18
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	22.8%	28

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of all students attending small rural schools



Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line



Poverty Gauge: Rank 43

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	WI	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	23.2%	44
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	6.2%	43
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	36.1%	44
Rural per capita income	$20,496	32
Rural per pupil property wealth	$155,271	31

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

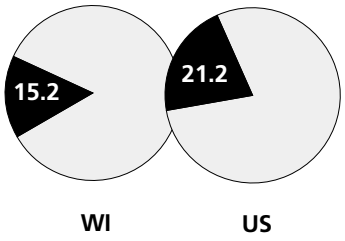
Challenges Gauge: Rank 40

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

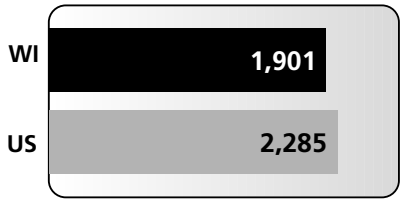
	WI	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.4%	32
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	14.1%	23
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	6.5%	38
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	15.2%	31
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	11.9%	40

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



Median organizational scale



Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 44

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	WI	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$1,595	33
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$4,813	40
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.2%	33
Rural student-teacher ratio	14.1	32
Median organizational scale (x 100)	1,901	25
Rural four-year graduation rate	83.2%	41
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	508.5	34

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

WYOMING – Wyoming's sparse population lives mostly in towns; consequently, this largely rural state scores low on some importance measures. More than half of all schools are located in rural areas of the state, yet their total enrollment is less than 25,000. Poverty is a critical issue, in terms of both income distress and property values. Student mobility and its related issues is an urgent challenge that demands the attention of educators and policymakers. Per pupil spending on instruction is among the highest in the nation on average, but since revenue is very unevenly distributed among rural districts, this high average may mask significant disparity in spending.

PRIORITY RANKING

34

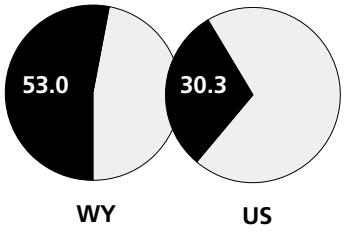
Importance Gauge: Rank 25

Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	WY	Rank*
Number of students enrolled in rural schools	24,168	47
Percentage of students enrolled in rural schools	28.6%	20
Percentage of public schools in rural areas	53.0%	9
Percentage of all students attending small rural schools	22.4%	11
Percentage of state education funding to rural schools	23.2%	27

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Percentage of public schools in rural areas



Rural per pupil property wealth

Poverty Gauge: Rank 21

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	WY	Rank*
Percentage of rural students who qualify for subsidized meals	34.9%	26
Percentage of rural families with school-age children living below the federal poverty line	11.7%	24
Percentage of rural female-headed households with preschool-age children living below the federal poverty line	53.0%	14
Rural per capita income	$20,628	35
Rural per pupil property wealth	$87,061	10

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

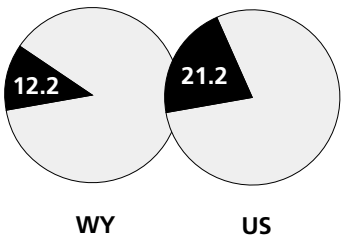
Challenges Gauge: Rank 32

Fair | Serious | Critical | Urgent

	WY	Rank*
Percentage of rural population age 5 or older who speak English "less than very well"	1.2%	38
Percentage of rural students who receive special education services	13.8%	31
Percentage of rural students who are minorities	14.0%	27
Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma	12.2%	46
Percentage of rural households changing residences in previous 15 months	17.9%	6

*** A rank of 1 is most urgent**

Percentage of rural adults without a high school diploma



General fund revenue gap

Policy Outcomes Gauge: Rank 44

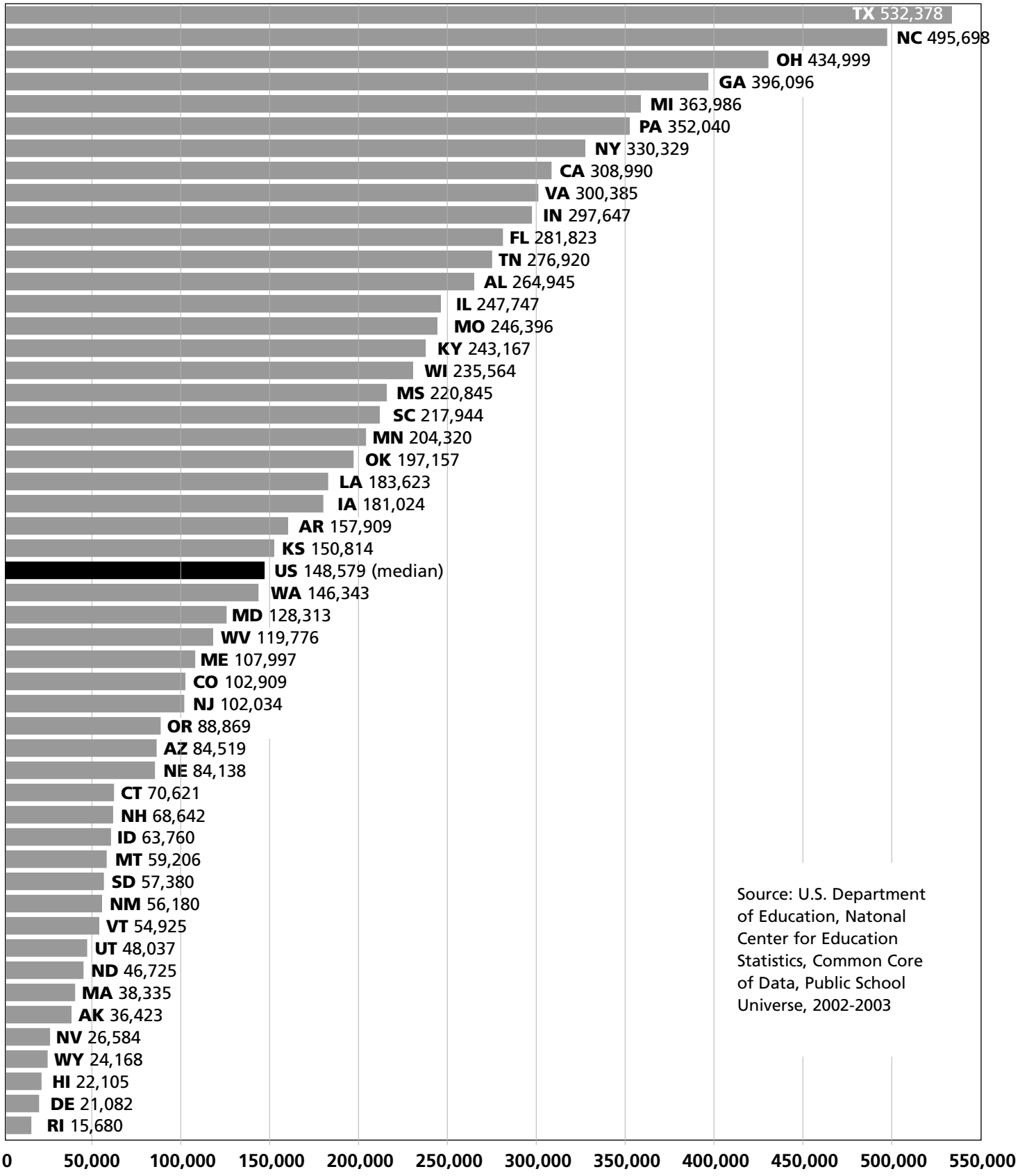
Notable | Important | Very Important | Crucial

	WY	Rank*
General fund revenue gap	$4,268	10
Rural per pupil expenditures for instruction	$5,600	46
Percentage of total expenditures spent on transportation in rural districts	4.6%	24
Rural student-teacher ratio	11.4	50
Median organizational scale (x 100)	773	39
Rural four-year graduation rate	80.9%	35
Rural NAEP math and reading combined score for grades 4 and 8	508.5	34

*** A rank of 1 is most important**

Number of Public School Students Enrolled in Rural Schools

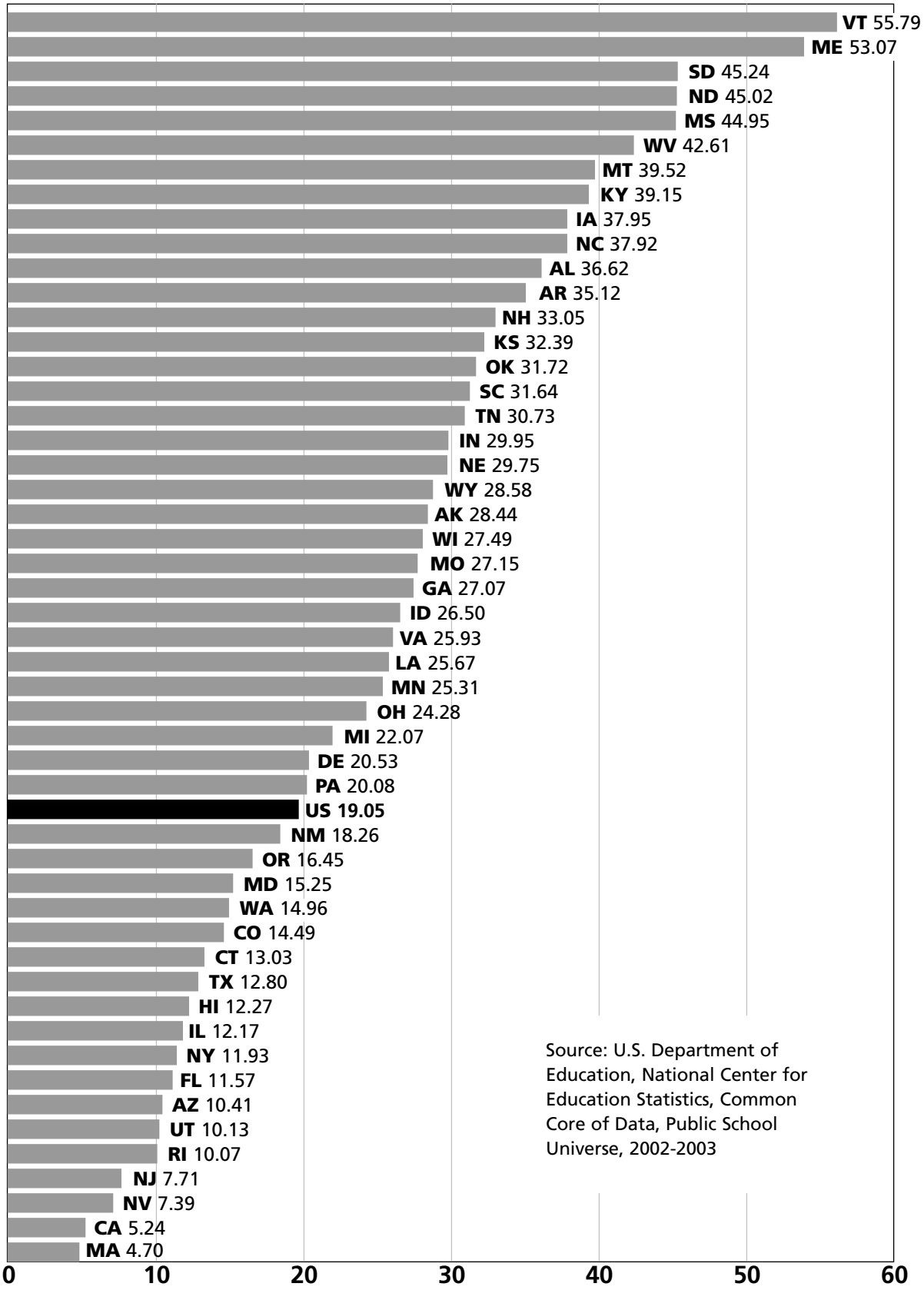
The total number of public school students who are enrolled in schools located in rural areas.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Natonal Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003

Percentage of Public School Students Enrolled in Rural Schools

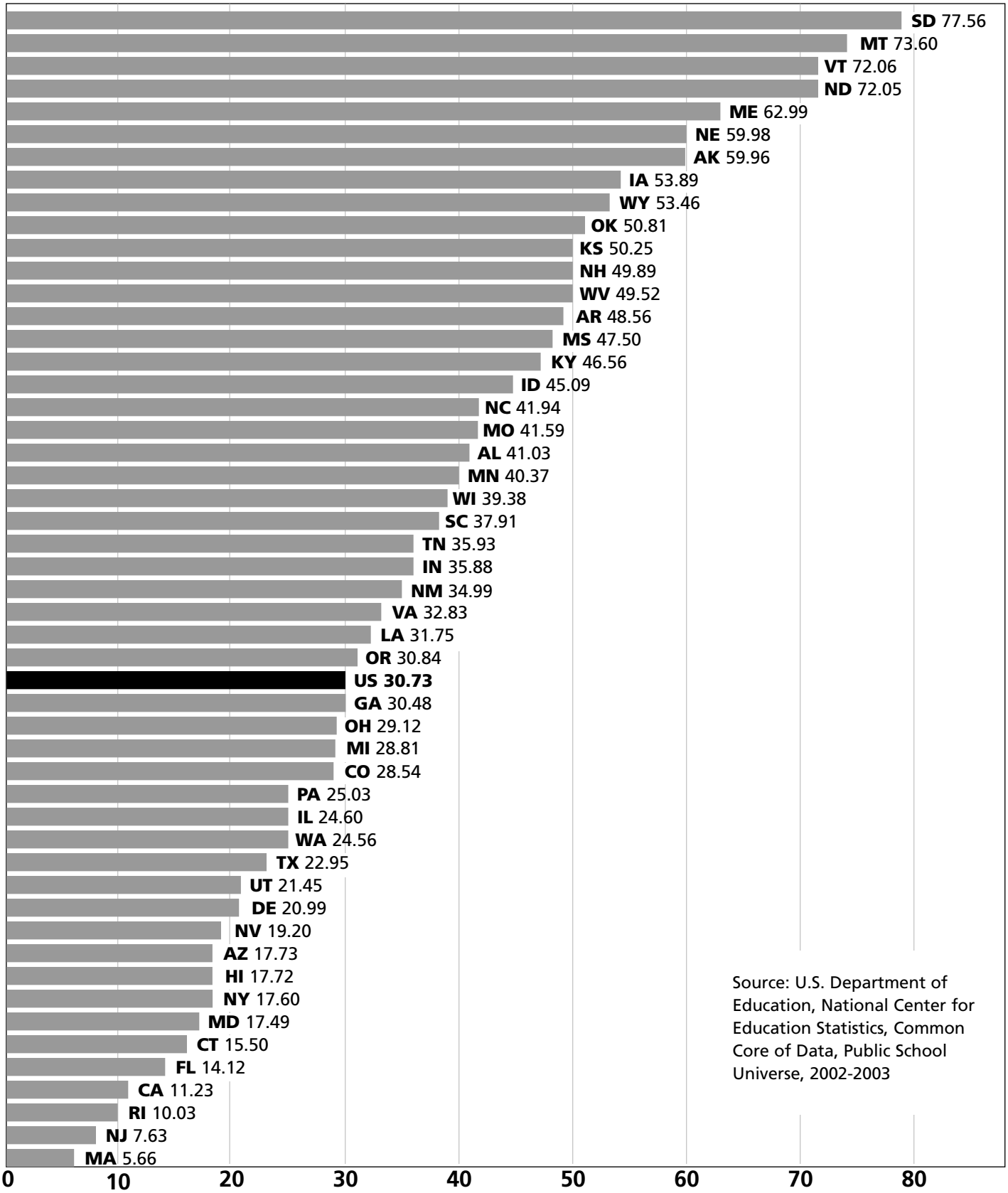
The number of public school students who are enrolled in schools in rural areas, expressed as a percentage of all public school students in the state.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003

Percentage of Public Schools in Rural Areas

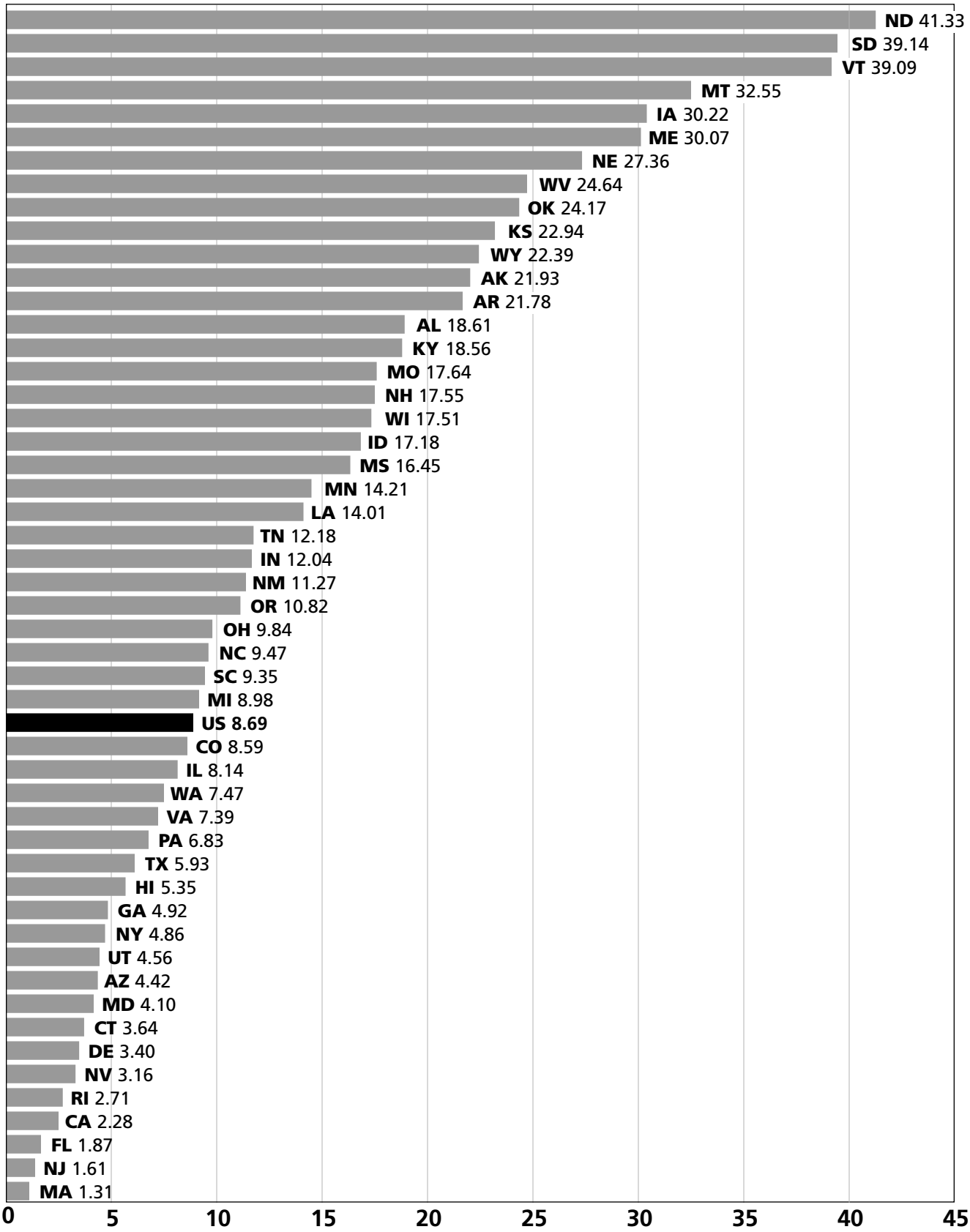
The number of public schools located in places classified as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau, expressed as a percentage of all public schools in the state.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003

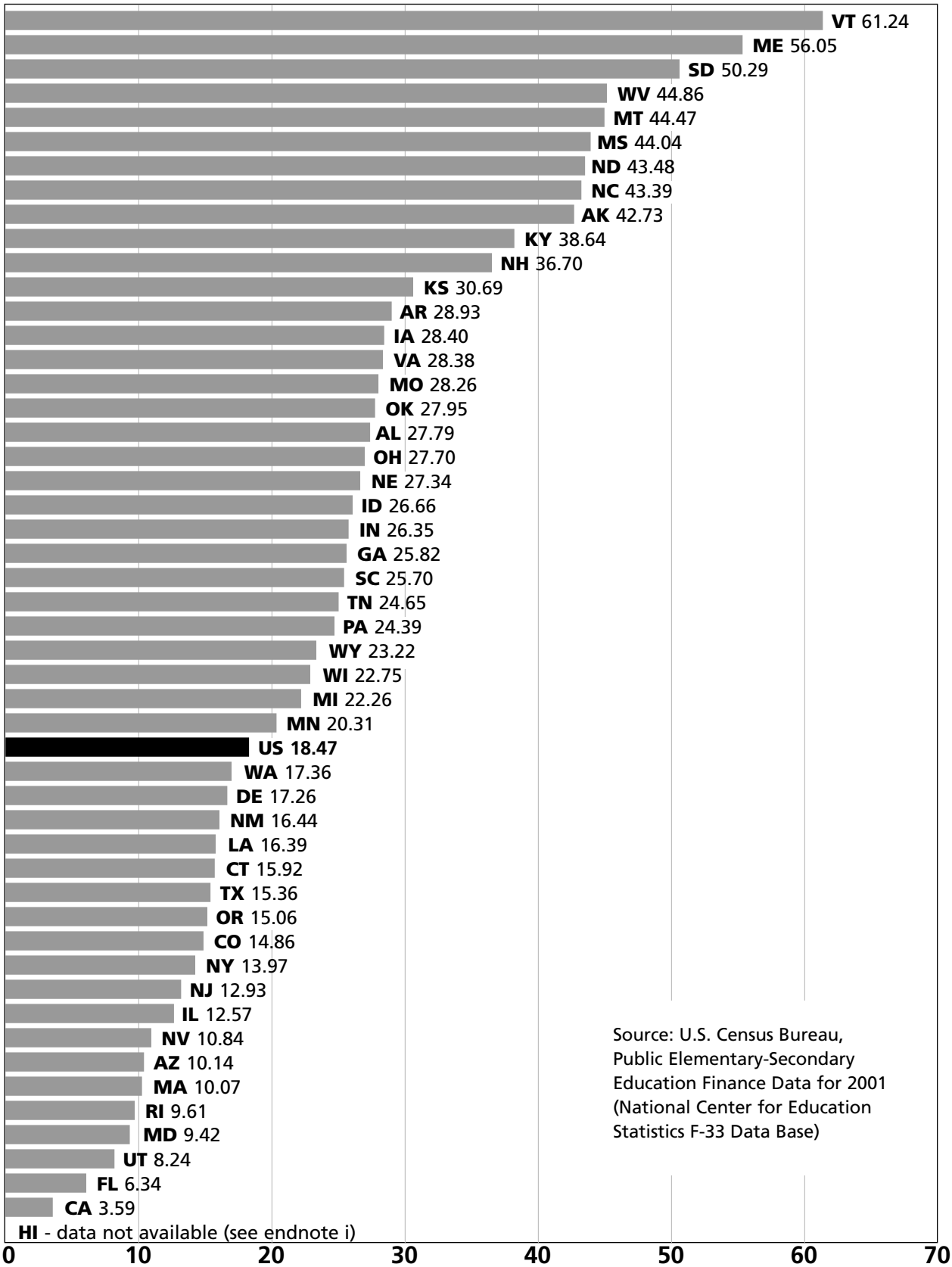
Percentage of All Students Attending Small Rural Schools

The number of students enrolled in rural public schools with cohort enrollment size below the national median, expressed as a percentage of the total number of public school students.



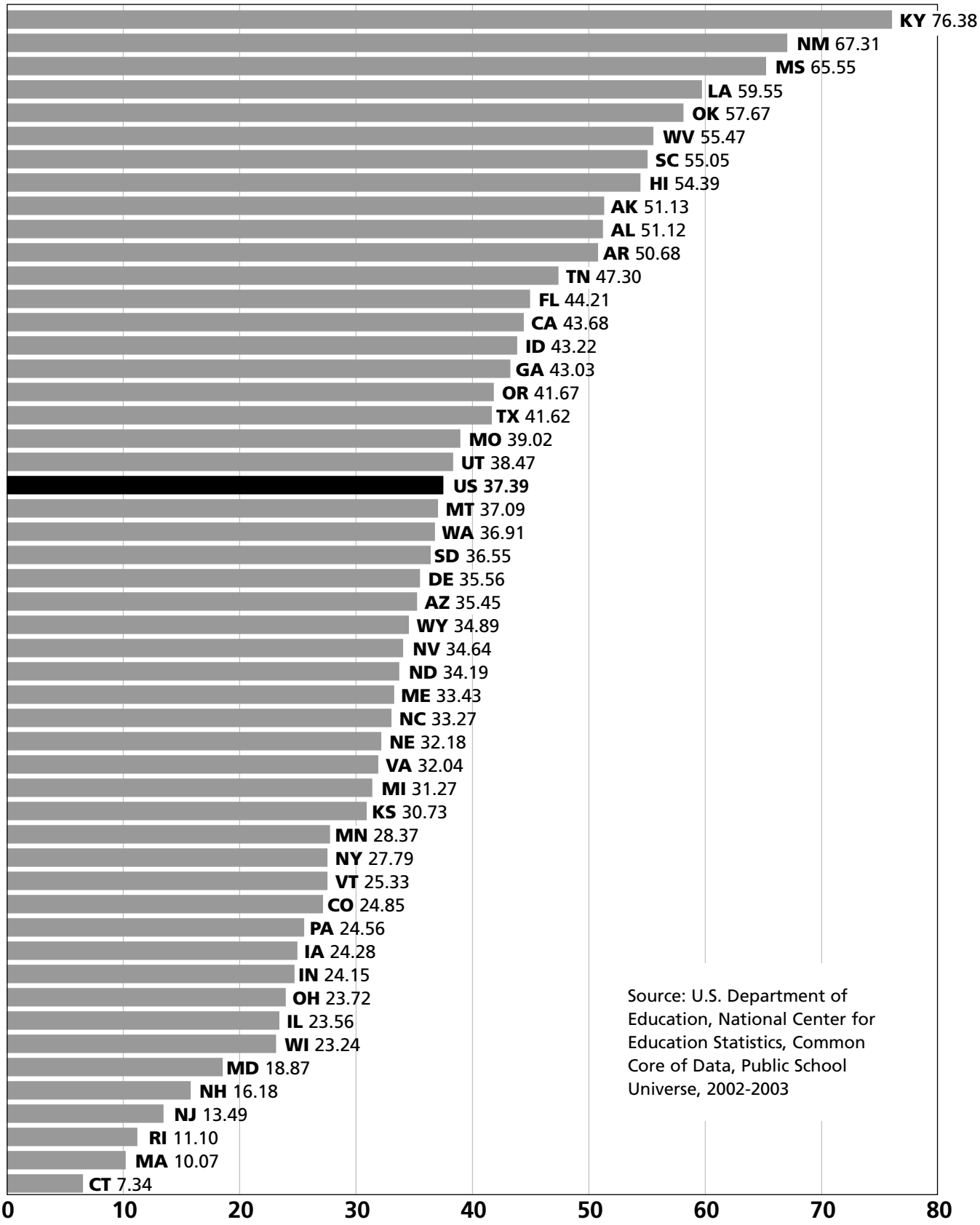
Percentage of State Education Funding Going to Rural Schools

State education funding to local school districts located in rural settings, expressed as a percentage of all state education funding to local school districts.



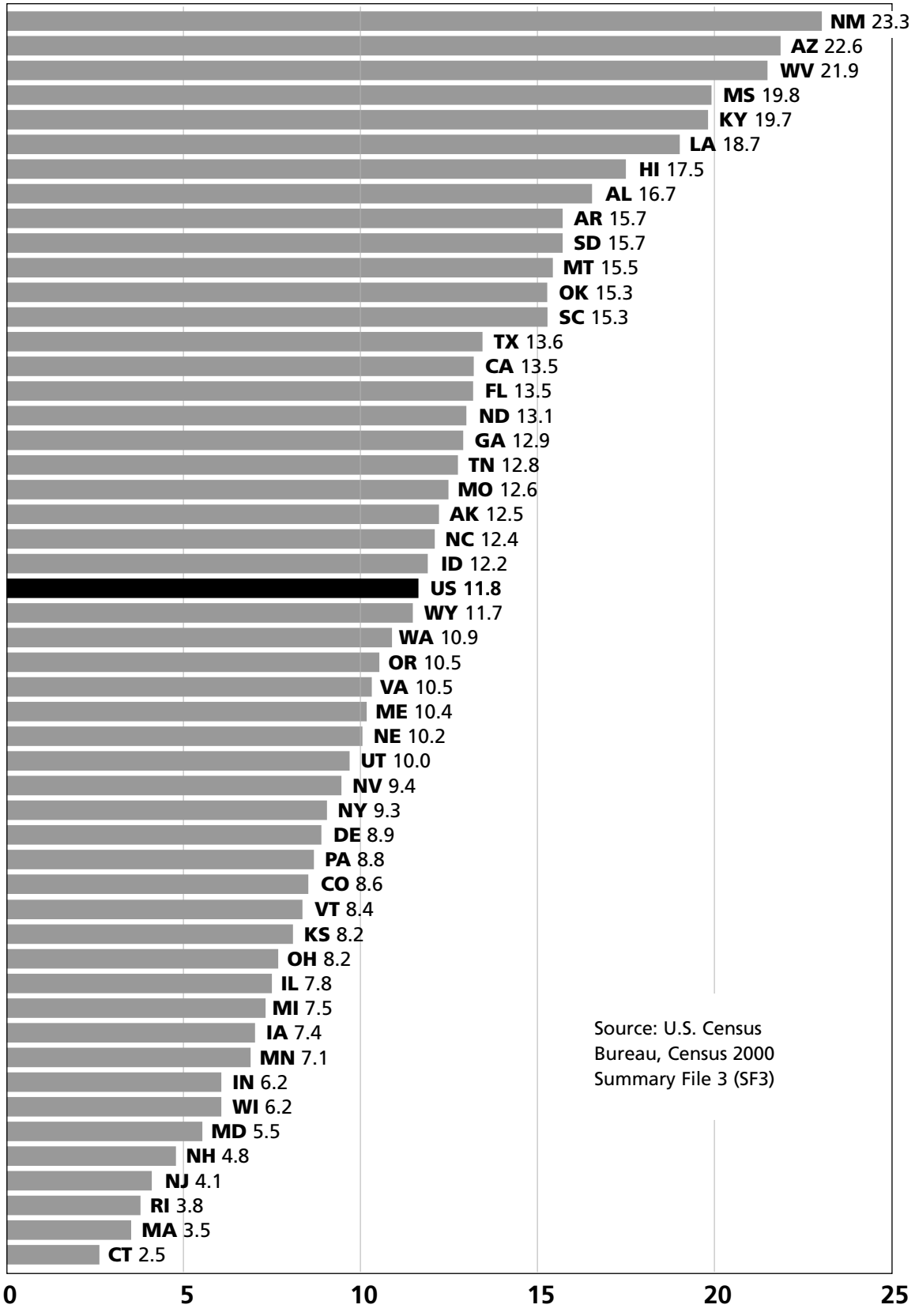
Percentage of Rural Students Eligible for Subsidized Meals

Students attending public schools in rural areas who qualify for free or reduced-price meal programs, expressed as a percentage of all students attending public schools in rural areas.



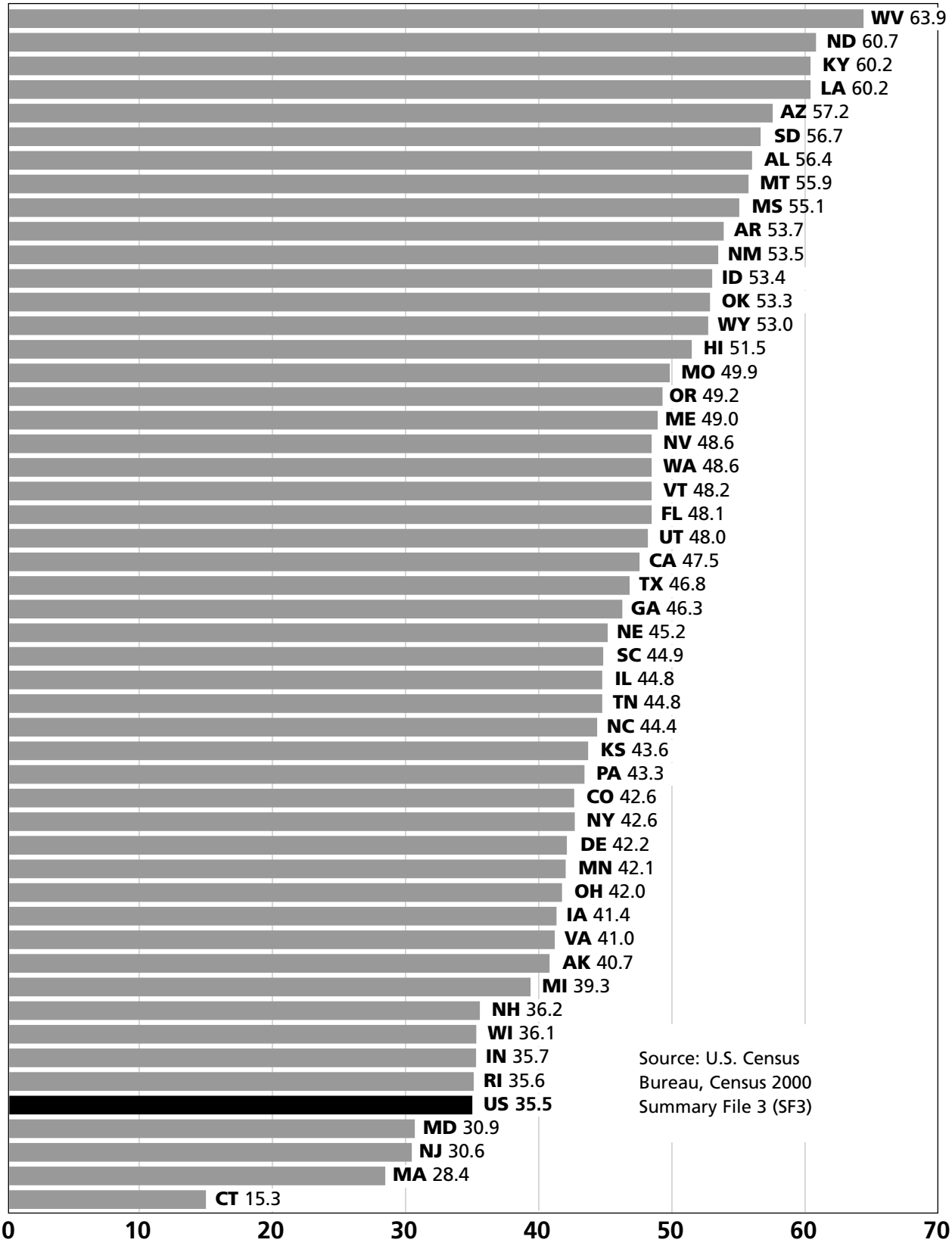
Percentage of Rural Families with School-Age Children Living Below the Federal Poverty Line

Families with children aged 5-18 with family income below the federal poverty line and living in rural areas, expressed as a percentage of all families with children aged 5-18 living in rural areas.



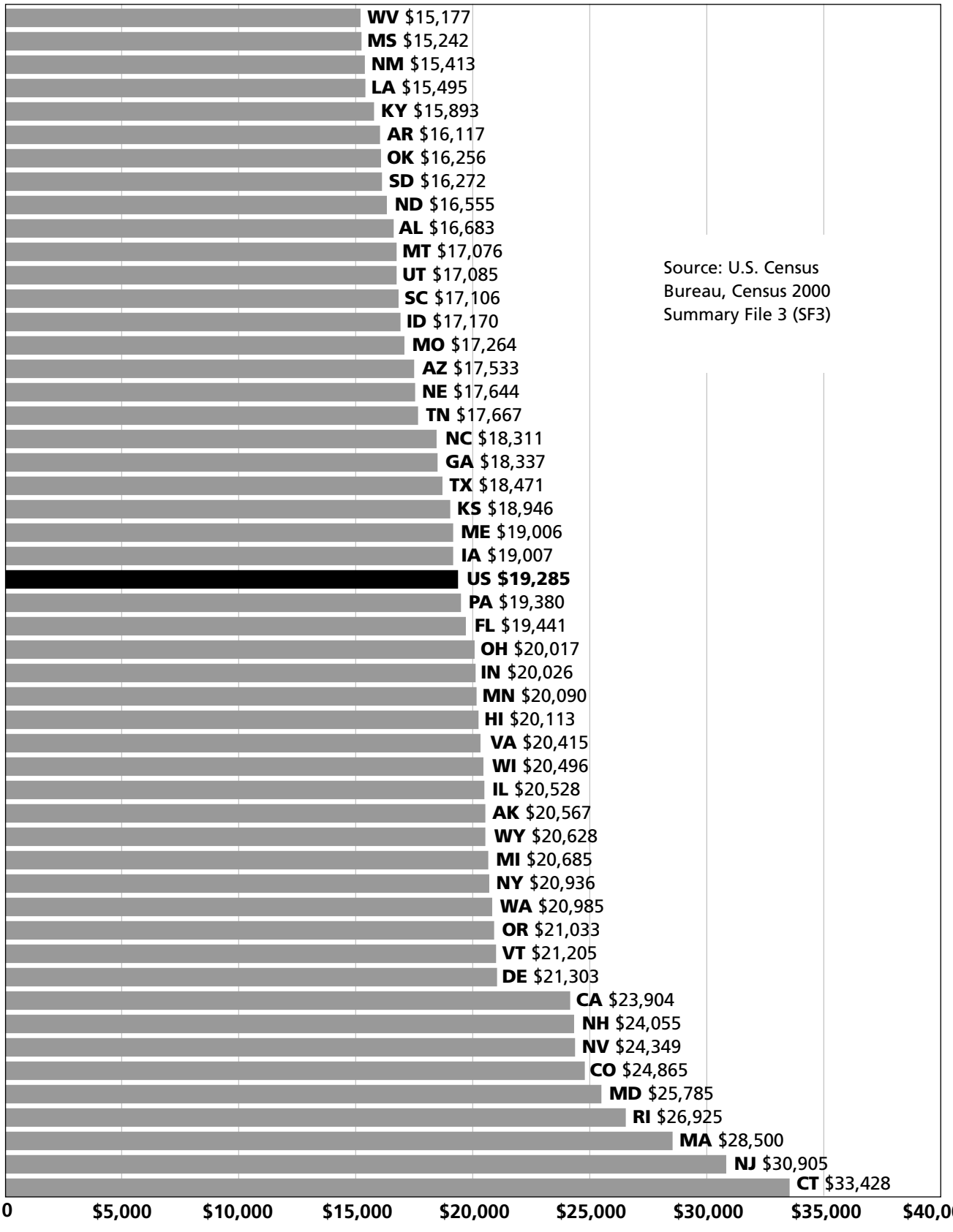
Percentage of Rural Female-Headed Households with Preschool-Age Children Living below the Federal Poverty Line

Female-headed households with children age 4 and under with household income below the federal poverty line and living in rural areas, expressed as a percentage of all rural female-headed households with children age 4 and under.



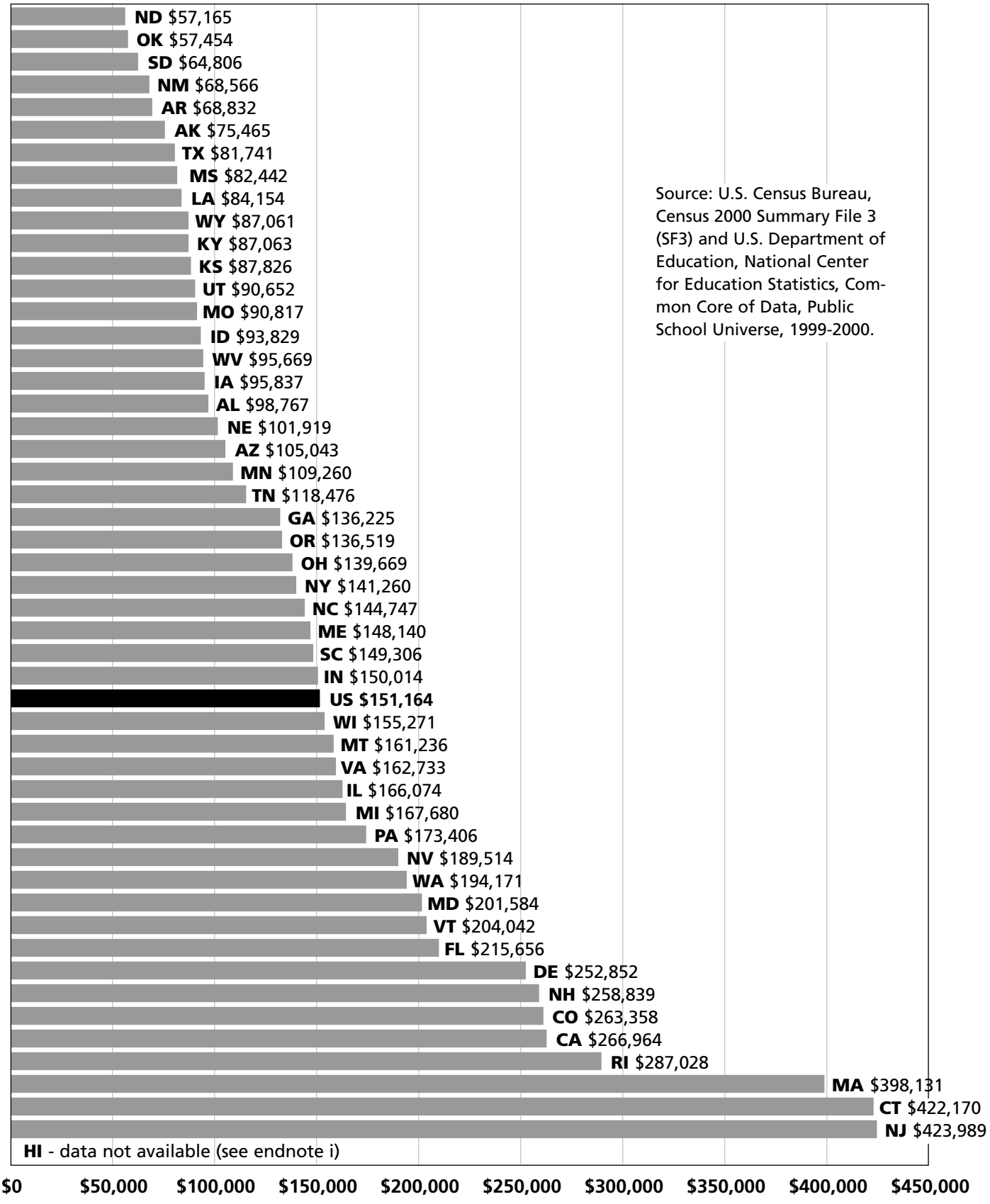
Rural Per Capita Income

Per capita income for individuals residing in areas designated as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau.



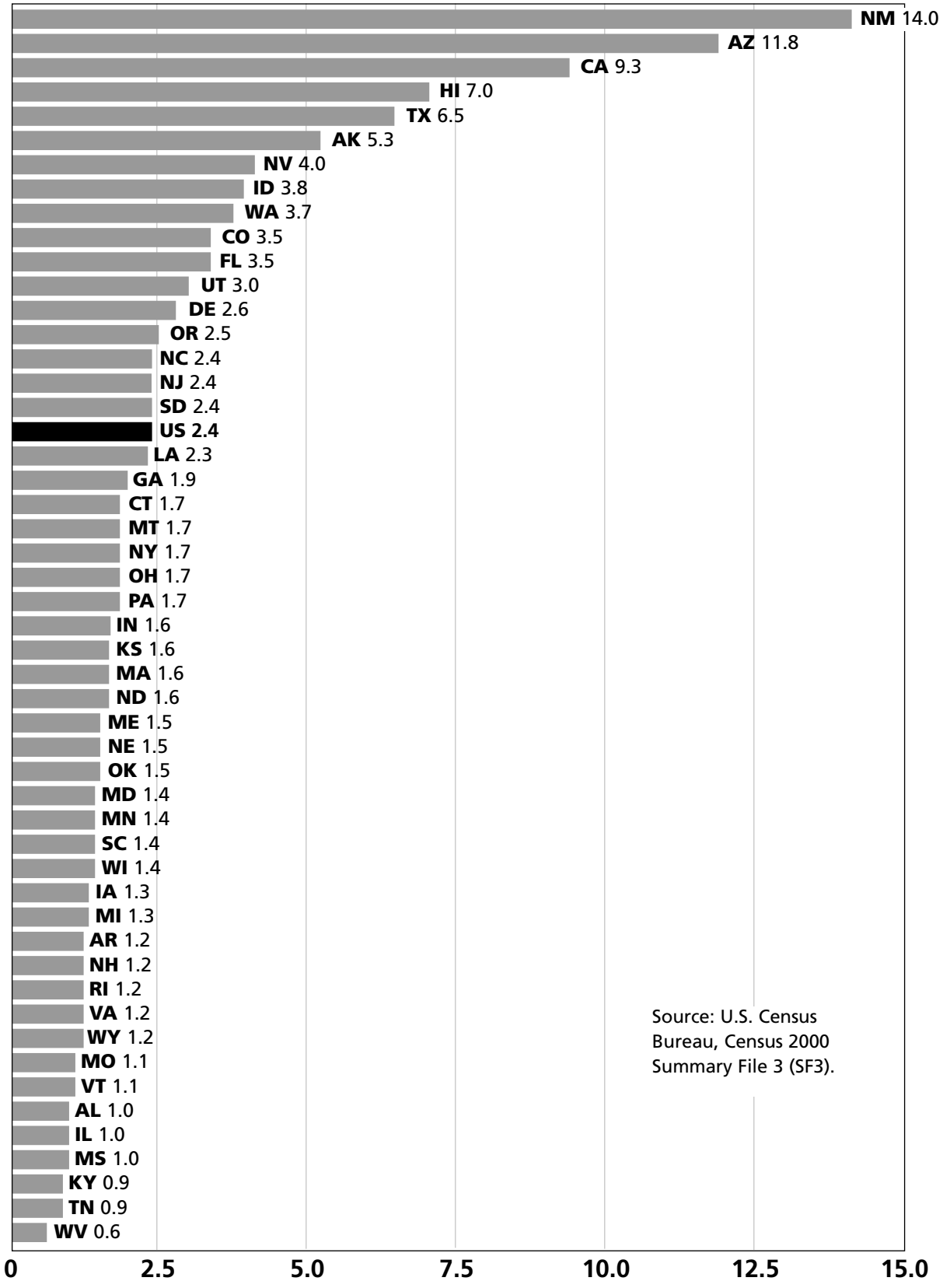
Rural Per-Pupil Property Wealth

The total value of all owner-occupied property in rural school districts, divided by the total number of students enrolled in those districts.



Percentage of Rural Population Age 5 or Older Who Speak English "Less Than Very Well"

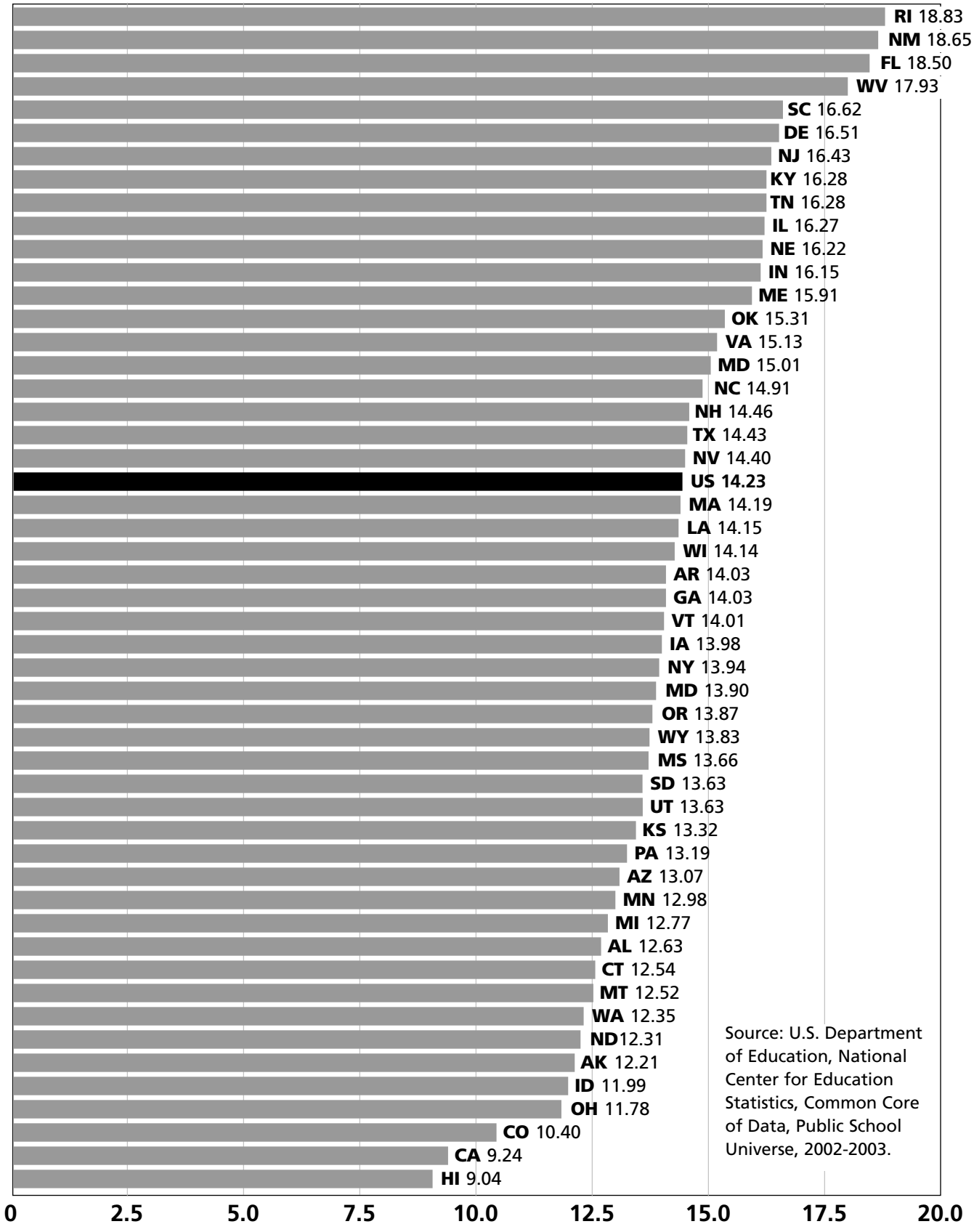
Individuals age 5 or older who live in rural areas and speak English "less than very well," expressed as a percentage of all individuals age 5 or older who live in rural areas.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3).

Percentage of Rural Students Who Receive Special Education Services

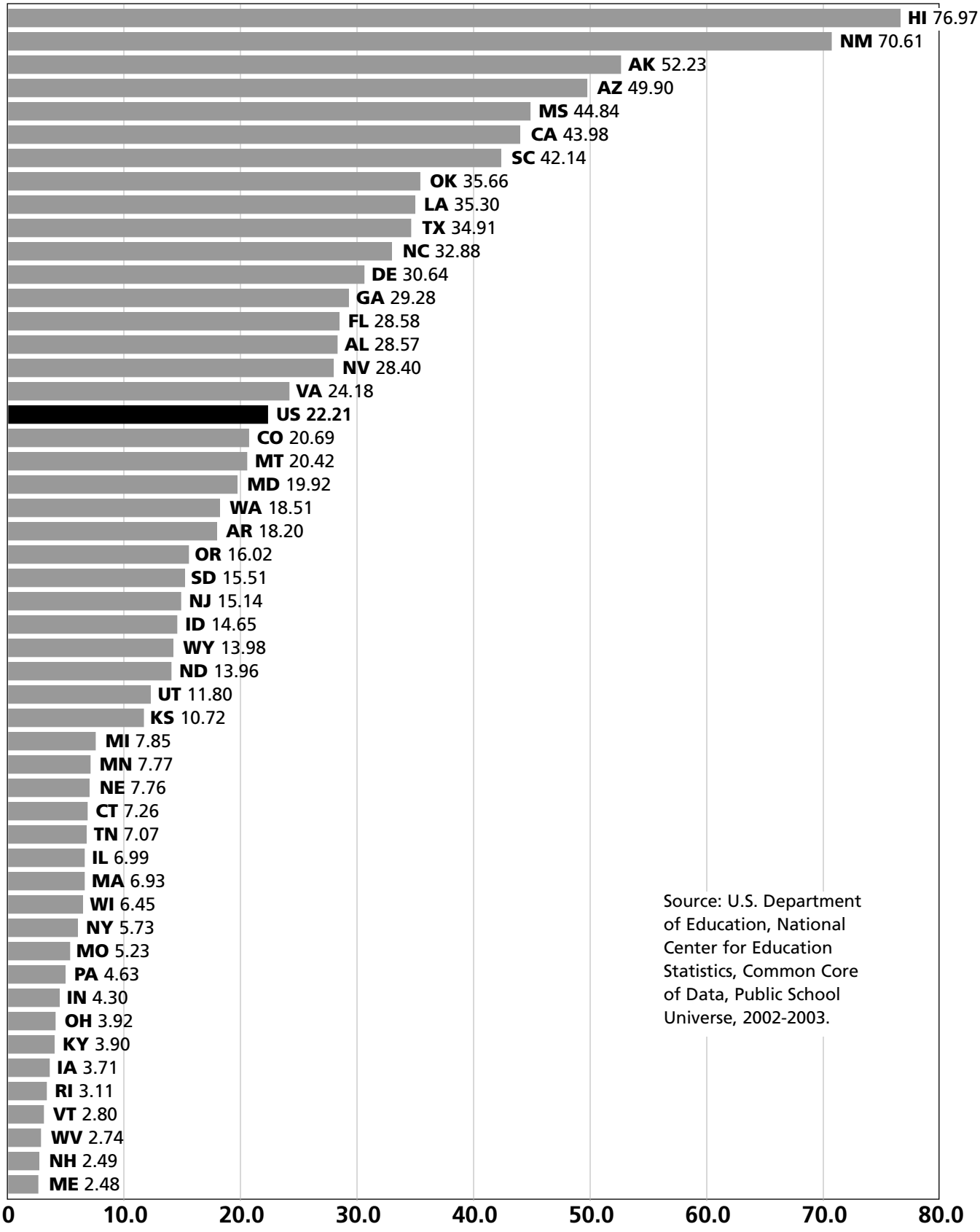
Students enrolled in rural schools who receive special education services, expressed as a percentage of all students enrolled in rural schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003.

Percentage of Rural Students Who Are Minorities

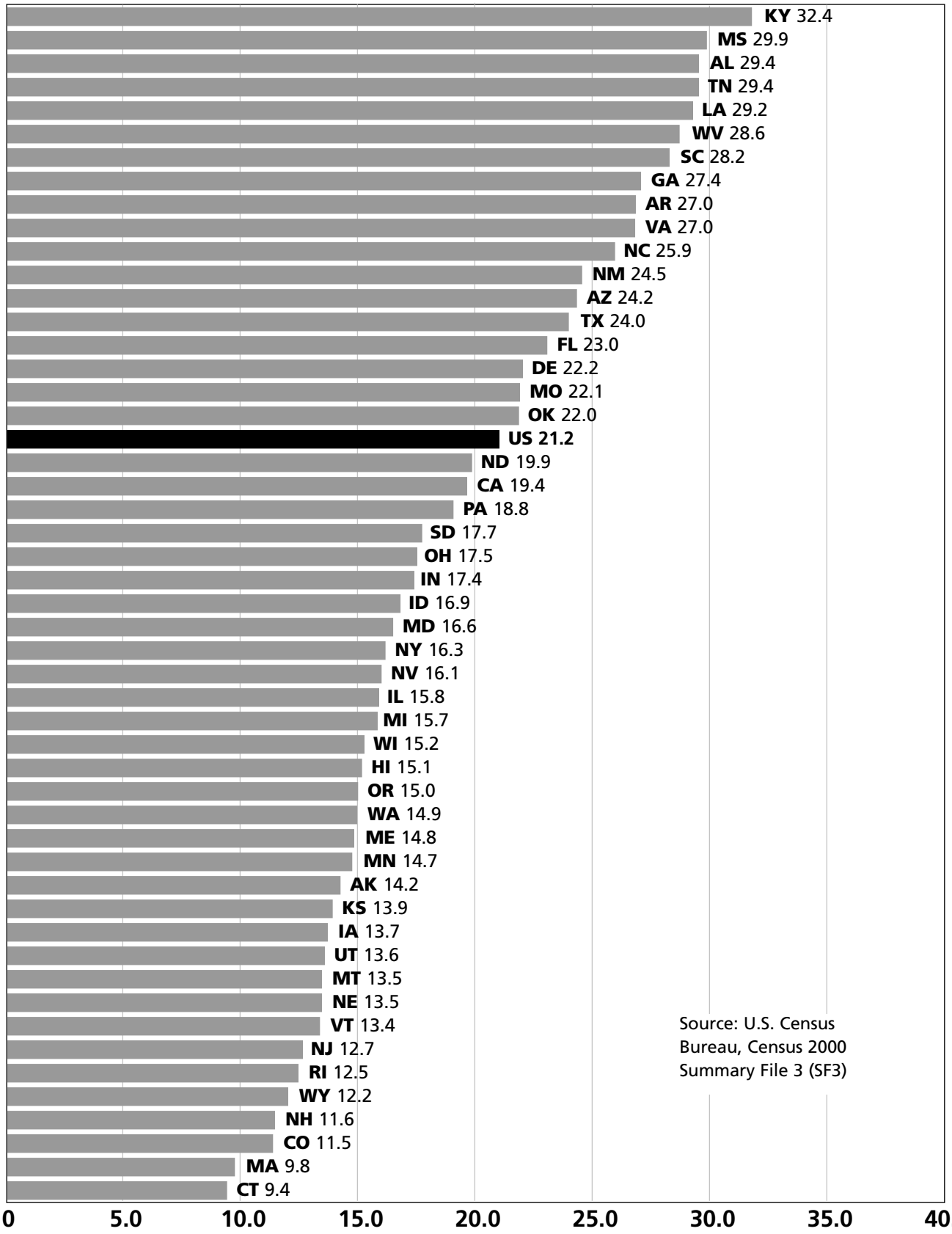
The number of students enrolled in rural schools who are minorities, expressed as a percentage of all students enrolled in rural schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003.

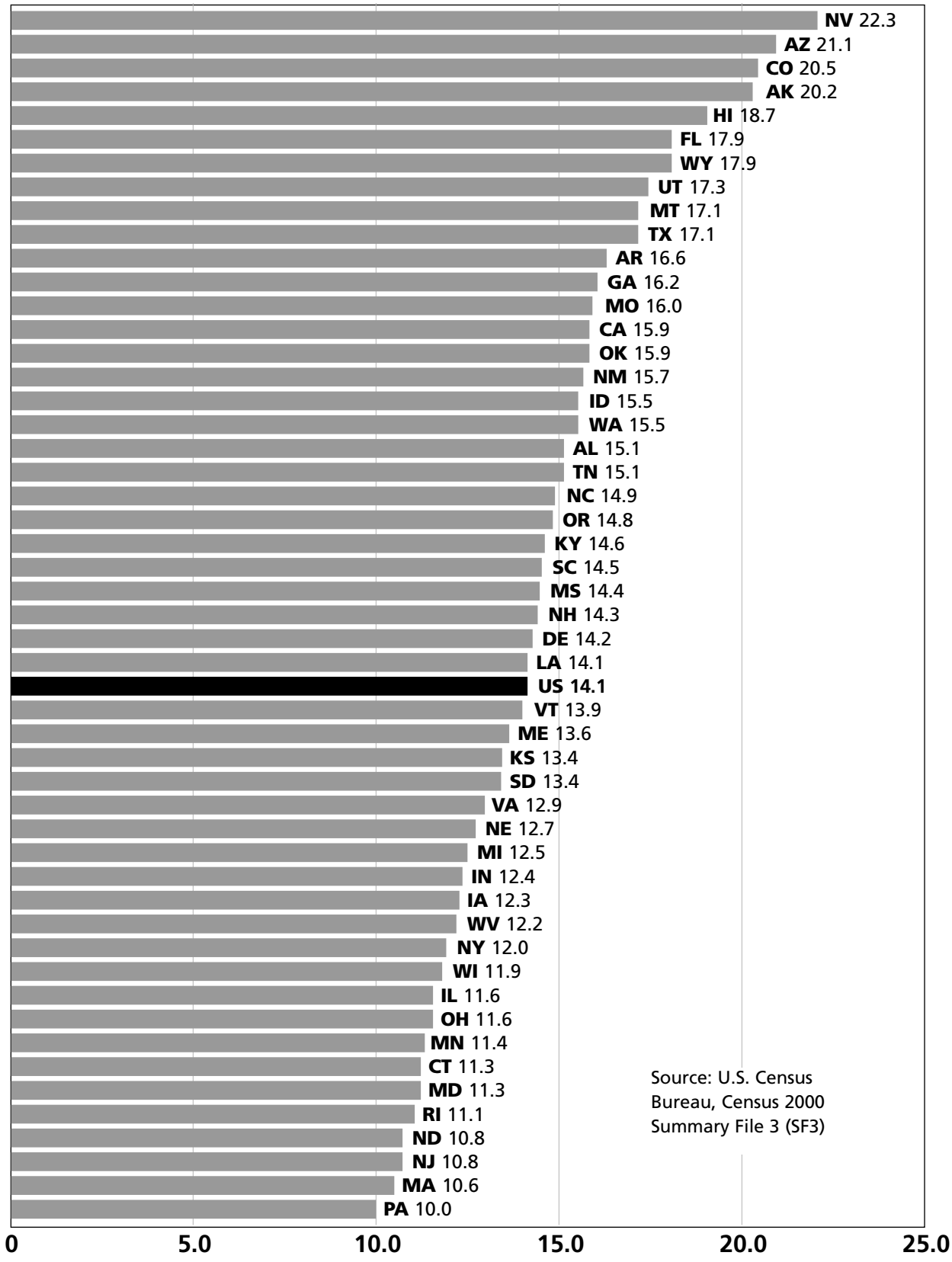
Percentage of Rural Adults without a High School Diploma

Number of adults age 19 and older living in rural areas who do not hold a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED), expressed as a percentage of all rural adults age 19 and older.



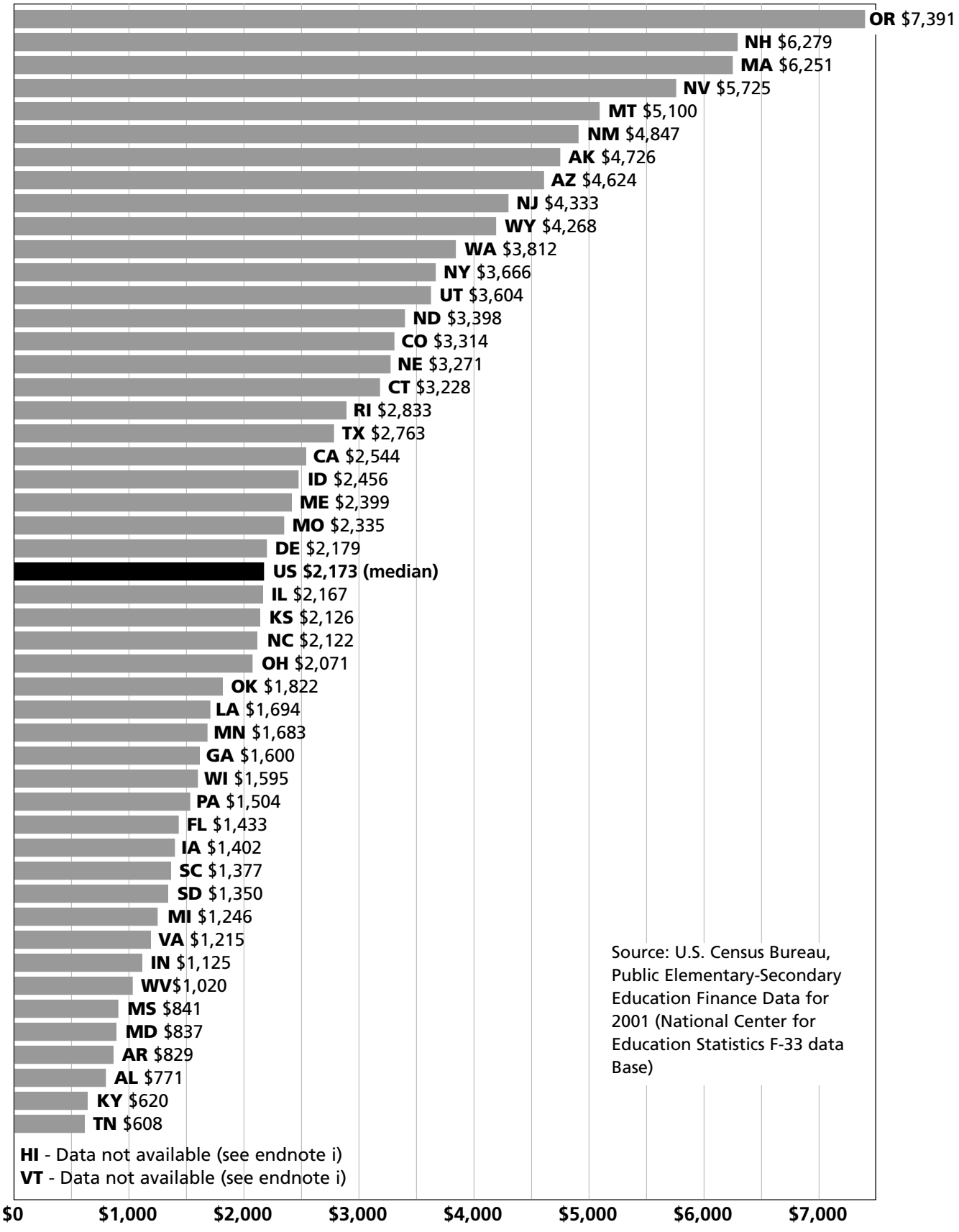
Percentage of Rural Households Changing Residences in the Previous 15 Months

Number of households residing in rural areas who have changed residences in the previous 15 months, expressed as a percentage of the total number of households residing in rural areas.



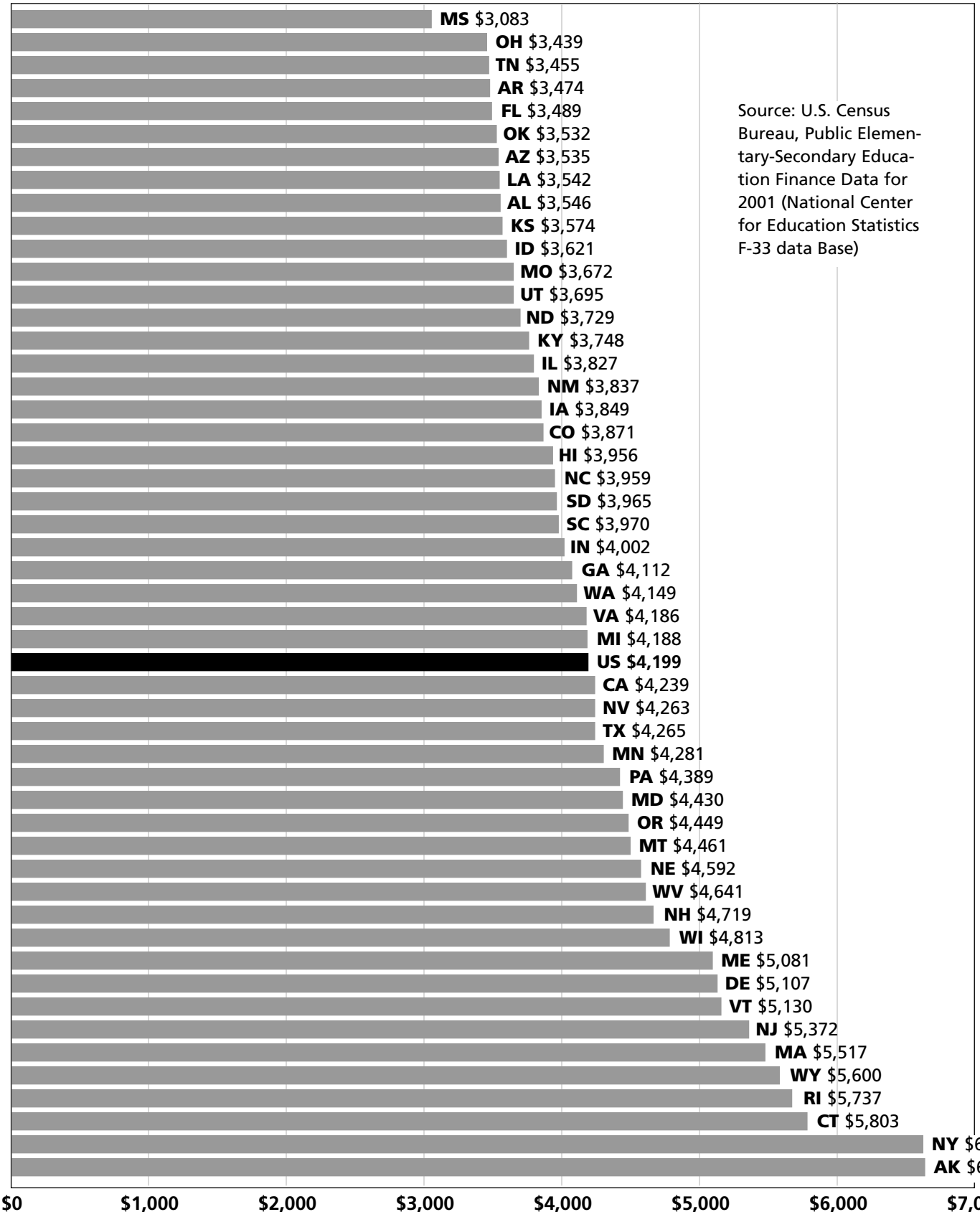
General Fund Revenue Gap

The range in general fund revenues for rural school districts from state and local sources (note: the highest 20% and lowest 20% in each state were excluded as outliers).



Rural Per Pupil Expenditures for Instruction

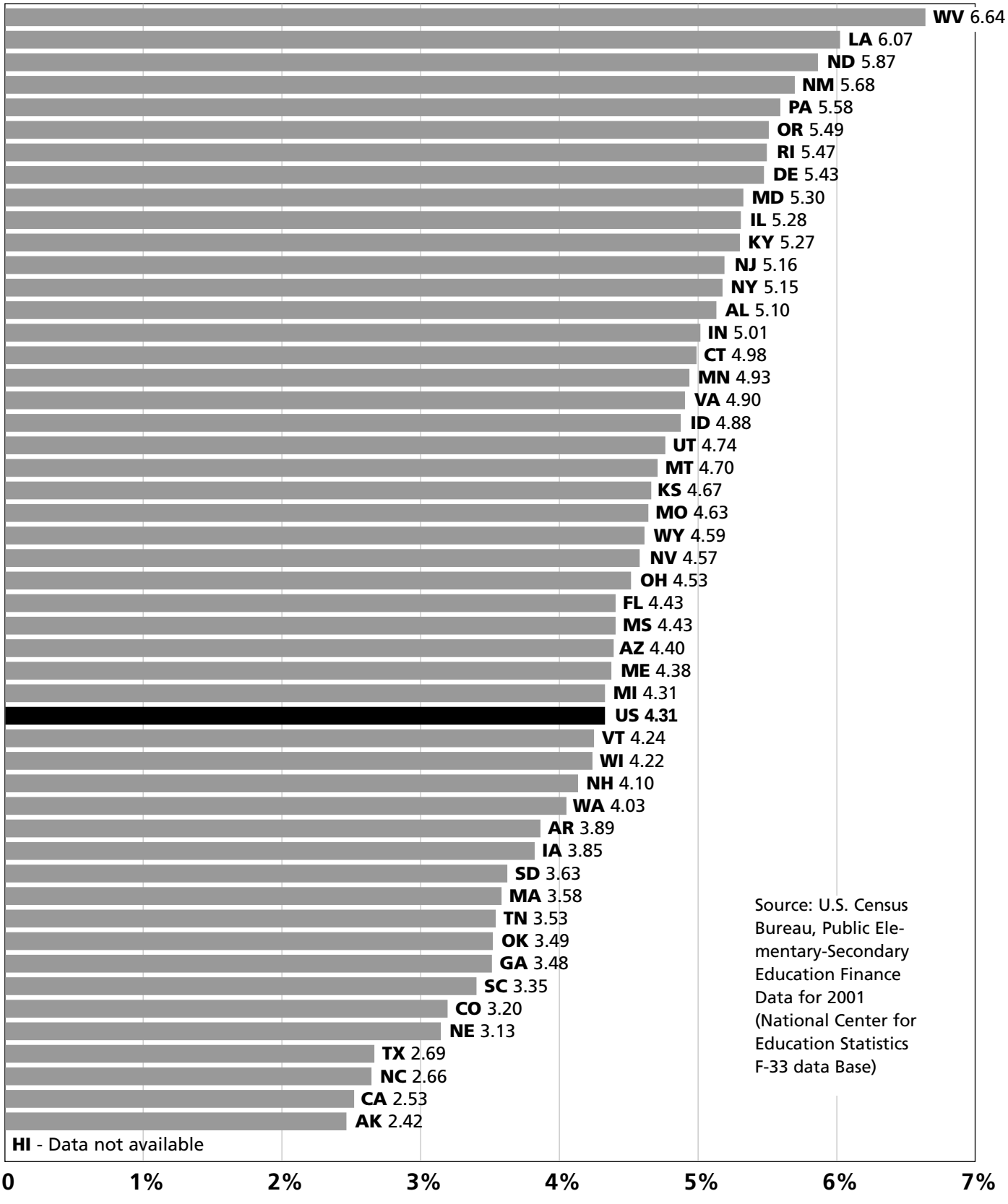
Total current expenditures for instruction (i.e., for activities associated with the interaction of students and teachers in the classroom) in rural school districts, divided by the total number of students enrolled in those districts.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data for 2001 (National Center for Education Statistics F-33 data Base)

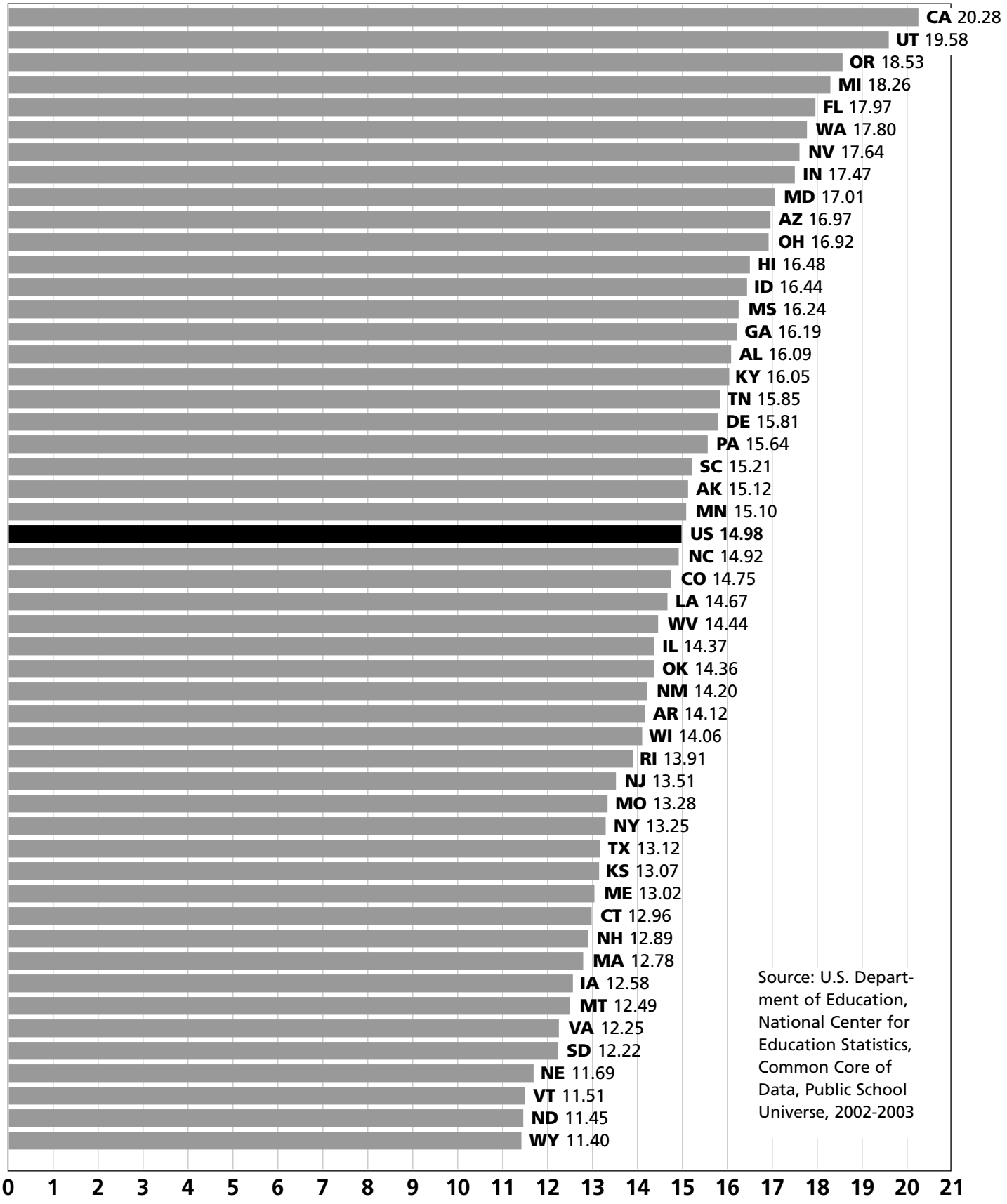
Percentage of Total Current Expenditures Spent on Transportation in Rural Districts

Total expenditures for vehicle operation, monitoring riders, and vehicle servicing and maintenance, expressed as a percentage of total elementary-secondary spending in rural districts.



Rural Student-Teacher Ratio (Student-Weighted)

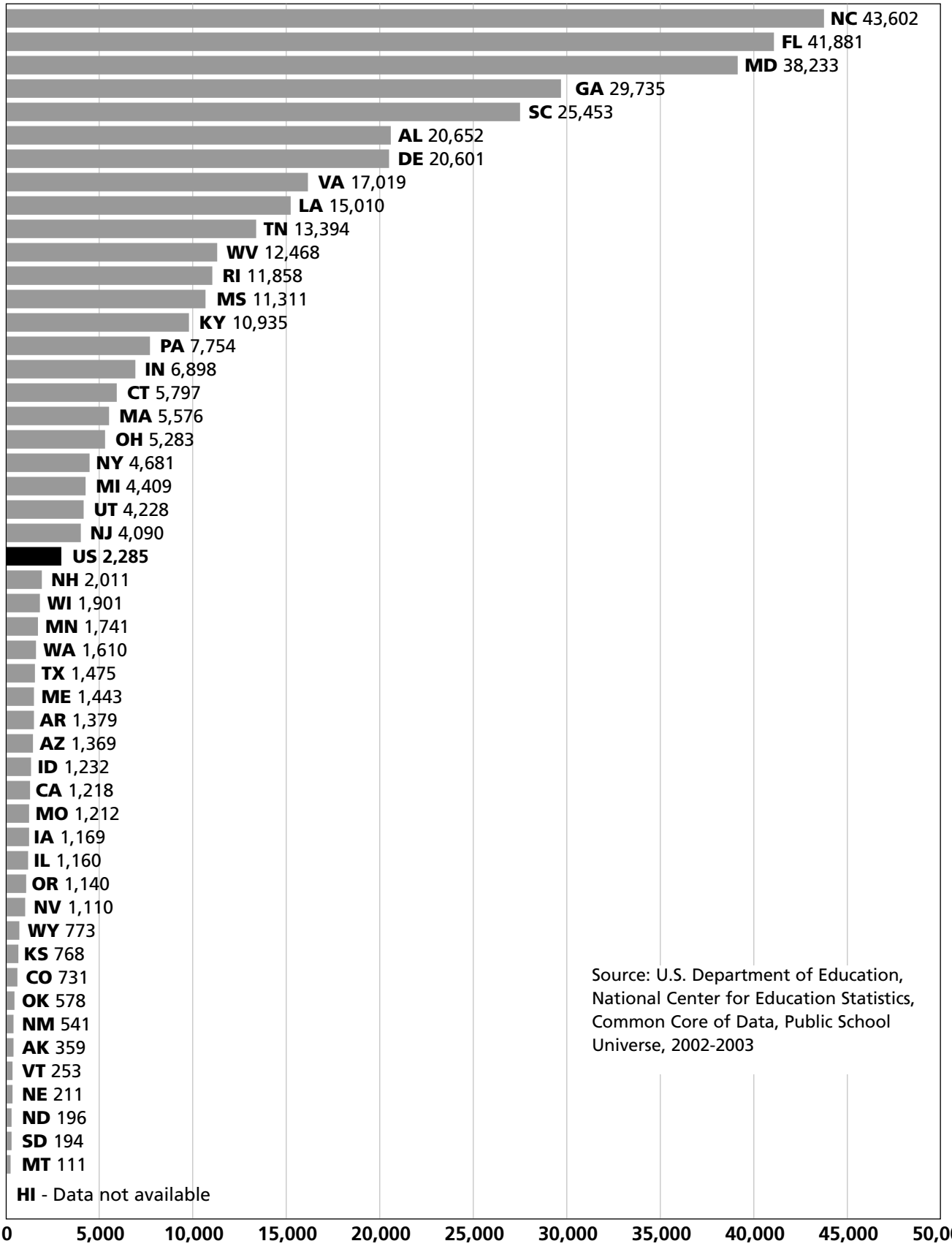
The ratio of all students enrolled in rural schools to all teachers employed in rural schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2002-2003

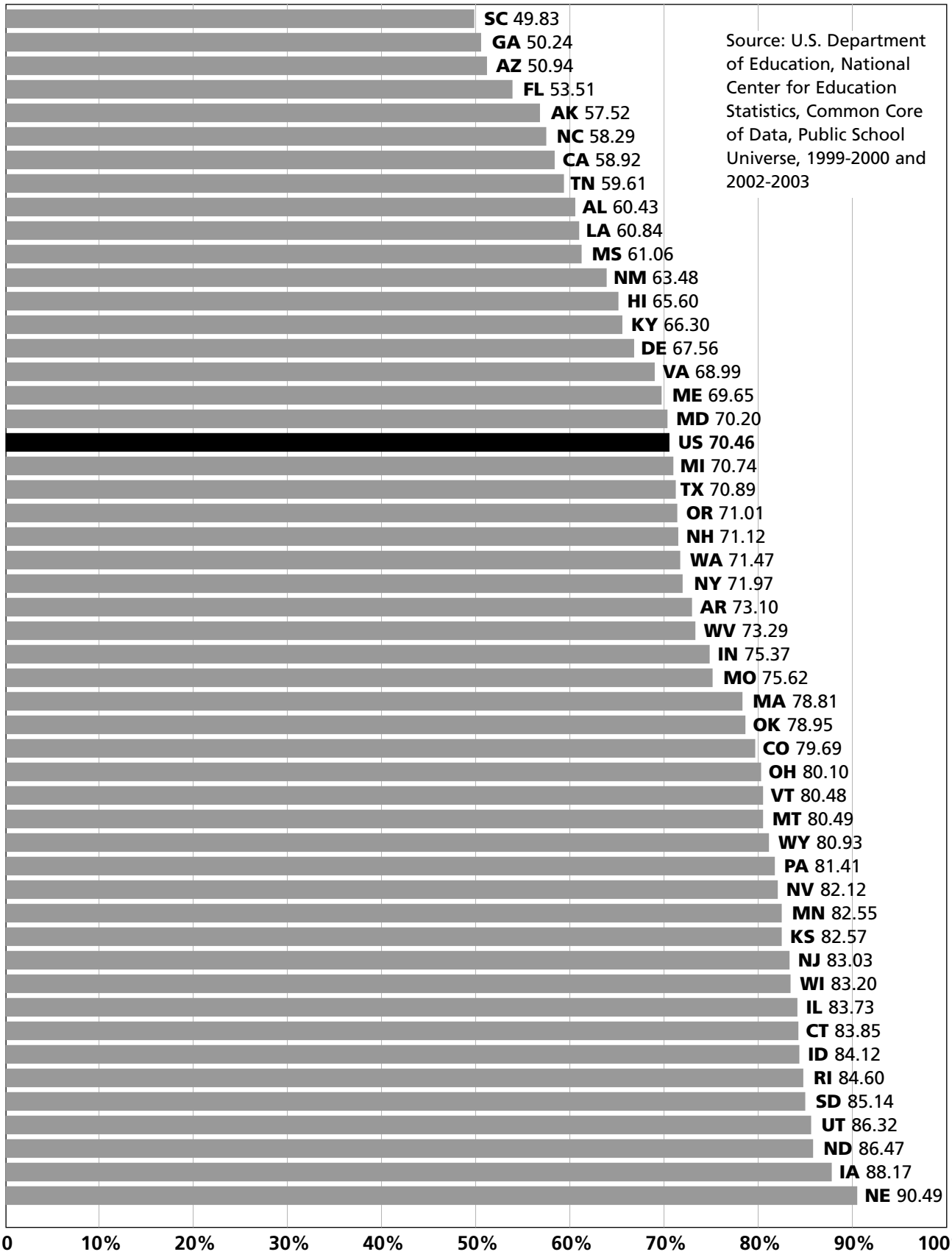
Median Organizational Scale

The state median for the organizational scale indicator obtained by multiplying school enrollment by district enrollment (note: for simplification, the indicators were divided by 100).



Rural Four-Year Graduation Rate

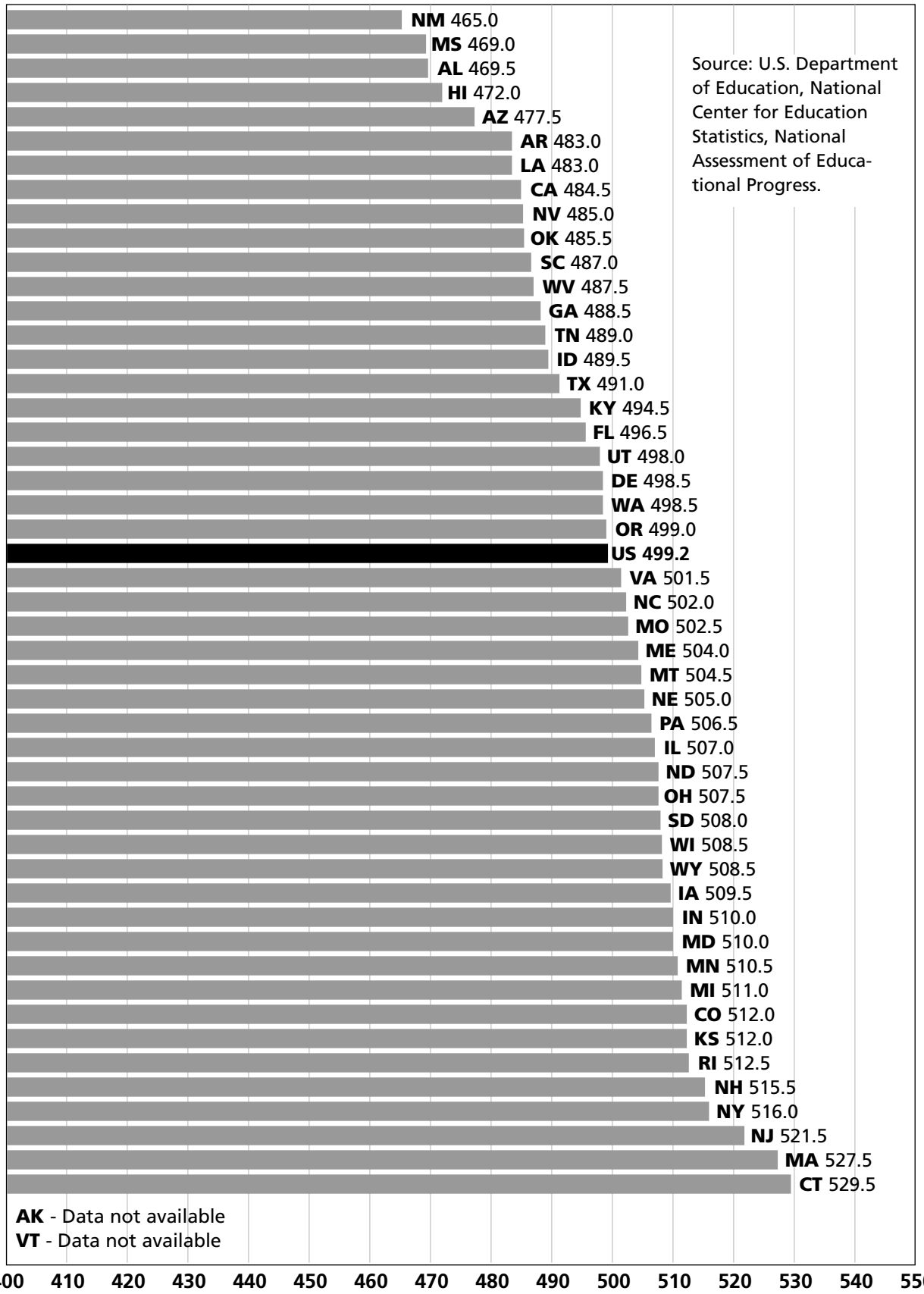
The total number of rural high-school graduates for school year 2001-2002, divided by the number of rural ninth-grade students enrolled in the 1998-99 school year.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 1999-2000 and 2002-2003

Rural NAEP Math and Reading Combined Score for Grades 4 and 8

The average of mean scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for both math and reading (grades 4 and 8), as reported by the U.S. Department of Education for rural schools in each state.



www.ruraledu.org

National Office
1530 Wilson Blvd., Suite 240
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 243-1487
Fax: (703) 243-6035

Printed on recycled paper