Evaluation of the Implementation of the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Program

Interim Report

U.S. Department of Education

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Program

Interim Report

Kathleen Magill, Berkeley Policy Associates
Cynthia Reeves, Consultant
Kelly Hallberg, Learning Point Associates
Trisha Hinojosa, Learning Point Associates

Submitted to

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development
Policy and Program Studies Service

2009

This report was prepared for the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-04-CO-0027-0004. The project monitor was Erica Lee in the Policy and Program Studies Service. The views expressed herein are those of the contractor. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

U.S. Department of Education
Arne Duncan
Secretary

Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development
Carmel Martin
Assistant Secretary

Policy and Program Studies Service
Alan L. Ginsburg
Director

December 2009

Contents

Exhibits

Executive Summary

The Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) program is part of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) that was authorized under Title VI, Part B of the *Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965* (*ESEA*), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (*NCLB*). The RLIS program provides additional funds to help rural districts serving low-income students make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as described in section 1111(b)(2) of the *ESEA*. RLIS funds may be used to support a variety of activities, including teacher recruitment and retention; teacher professional development; support for educational technology; parental involvement activities; activities authorized under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program; and activities authorized under Title I, Part A, and Title III of the *ESEA*.

RLIS funds are distributed to state education agencies, which then distribute money to the school districts that meet the following RLIS funding criteria: (a) the district is not eligible for a grant from the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program, which serves rural school districts that have fewer than 600 students or that serve extremely sparsely populated areas; (b) 20 percent or more of the children ages 5 through 17 served by the district are from families with incomes below the poverty line; and (c) all of the schools included in the district must have a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale code of 6 (small town), 7 (rural), or 8 (rural near an urban area).

For the 2008–09 school year, the RLIS program distributed almost $85 million to 40 states. In turn, the states distributed RLIS funds to 1,486 districts. Award amounts ranged from approximately $1,800 to more than $627,000, averaging about $57,000 per district and $28 per pupil. This report includes findings from interviews conducted during spring of the 2007–08 school year, during which the RLIS program distributed almost $85 million to 39 states. That year, states distributed RLIS funds to 1,247 districts. Awards ranged from approximately $2,100 to almost $750,000, averaging about $67,000 per district and $33 per pupil.

Key purposes of this study are to identify how states and school districts use RLIS funds, to identify the barriers to meeting state RLIS goals, and to assess the progress districts made toward improving student achievement. This interim report includes findings on state implementation of the RLIS program, state priorities for RLIS funds, and RLIS district characteristics.

Findings: State Implementation of the RLIS Program

- In the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08, state coordinators primarily viewed RLIS as a supplemental funding source to help rural, low-income schools make AYP. RLIS was not seen as a separate, stand-alone program.
- State coordinators in the nine sample states reported that districts that were in school improvement status targeted their RLIS funds to make AYP.
- According to the interviewed state coordinators, all nine states in the sample required RLIS districts to engage in a comprehensive planning process and to address gaps identified through local needs assessments. In seven of the nine states in the sample, the RLIS program was integrated into a consolidated planning and application process for

federal programs that required districts to show how they planned to use different funding sources to address identified needs and meet student achievement goals. State RLIS-related documents showed that there was considerable variability among the states with regard to the planning tools they used and to what extent they directed districts through the planning process.

- All of the interviewed states provided training and technical assistance to the districts on the RLIS program and application process. In particular, the states provided districts with assistance in identifying their specific needs for improvement.

Findings: District Characteristics

- RLIS districts had, on average, more students than other rural districts and fewer students than all districts nationally.
- Student-teacher ratios in RLIS districts were comparable with those nationally, but slightly higher than in other rural districts.
- Per-pupil spending was, on average, substantially lower in RLIS districts than in all districts nationally or in other rural districts.
- RLIS districts had a higher percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals than either districts overall or non-RLIS rural districts.
- RLIS districts also had a slightly higher proportion of students who had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) than did all U.S. districts and non-RLIS rural districts.

These interim findings will be further expanded in the final report, which will provide a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Rural and Low-Income School program. The final report will include an additional data collection—an online survey of the states and districts receiving RLIS funding and in-depth interviews with a sample of 45 districts receiving RLIS funding—and analysis of extant data at the state and district levels on student achievement outcomes from state assessments used for NCLB accountability.

Sources of Data

The evaluation's findings are based on multiple sources of data. To answer questions on state priorities, program administration and technical assistance, the evaluation included in-depth interviews with RLIS state staff members and an analysis of extant state documents in nine states. The nine states in the sample were those that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08, accounting for 62 percent of all RLIS funding that year. RLIS program data files were used to identify which districts were eligible for and received RLIS funds. In 28 of the 43 states that had ever received RLIS funding, all RLIS-eligible districts received funding in all six years of the program. The Common Core of Data (CCD) is the Department of Education's primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the United States. CCD is a comprehensive, annual, national statistical database of all public elementary and secondary schools and school districts, which contains data that are designed to be comparable across all

states. Demographic data from CCD were used to compare RLIS districts descriptively with non-RLIS rural districts and with all districts nationally.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

The Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) program is part of the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) that was authorized under Title VI, Part B of the *Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965* (*ESEA*), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (*NCLB*). Rural school districts with a high prevalence of students from low-income families in their communities often experience financial disadvantage because of a reduced property tax base, which is foundational in district funding. The RLIS program provides additional funds to help rural districts serving low-income students make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as described in section 1111(b)(2) of the *ESEA.* An additional grant program created under REAP, the Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program, targets school districts that have fewer than 600 students or that serve extremely rural areas.[1] SRSA funds are provided directly to eligible school districts by the U. S. Department of Education, while RLIS funds are awarded to state education agencies, which then distribute the funds to the school districts in their state that are determined by the Department to meet the RLIS funding criteria.

To be eligible for RLIS funds, a district must show that

- The district is not eligible for an SRSA grant;
- Twenty percent or more of the children aged 5 through 17 served by the district are from families with incomes below the poverty line; and
- All of the schools included in the district have a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale code of 6 (small town), 7 (rural), or 8 (rural near an urban area).[2]

For the 2008–09 school year, the RLIS program distributed almost $85 million to 40 states. In turn, the states distributed RLIS funds to 1,486 districts. Award amounts ranged from approximately $1,800 to more than $627,000, averaging about $57,000 per district and $28 per pupil.[3] This report includes findings from interviews conducted during spring of the 2007–08 school year, during which the RLIS program distributed almost $85 million to 39 states. States distributed RLIS funds to 1,247 districts. Awards ranged from approximately $2,100 to almost $750,000, averaging about $67,000 per district and $33 per pupil. RLIS funds are meant to be flexible and can be used to support a variety of activities, including teacher recruitment and retention; teacher professional development; support for educational technology; parental

[1] To be eligible to receive SRSA program funds, a district must show that (a) the district has a total average daily attendance of fewer than 600 students or serves only schools that are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 people per square mile and (b) the district includes only schools that either have a National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) locale code of 7 (rural) or 8 (rural near an urban area) or are located in an area of the state defined as rural by a governmental agency of the state.

[2] See Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Web site, Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), SRSA program eligibility (http: //www.ed.gov/programs/reapsrsa/eligibility.html) and RLIS Program eligibility (http: //www.ed.gov/programs/reaprlisp/eligibility.html).

[3] Per-pupil spending is calculated based on average daily attendance.

involvement activities; activities authorized under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program; and activities authorized under Title I, Part A, and Title III of the *ESEA*.

The findings of this study will provide information to the Department for RLIS program management and improvement. Additionally, these findings will help the Department prepare congressionally mandated biennial reports on the RLIS program and its participation in required performance reporting, accountability, and program assessment activities.

Scope of This Interim Report

Key purposes of this study are to identify how states and school districts use RLIS program funds, to assess the progress states and districts made toward RLIS program goals, and to gain insights into what factors acted as facilitators and barriers to meeting state RLIS goals.

This interim report contains findings based on the following data collections and analyses:

- Demographic data for districts eligible for RLIS funding
- Interviews with staff members from state education agencies regarding RLIS goals, priorities and uses of funds
- RLIS-related documents such as federal grant application instructions and technical assistance guides, obtained from the sampled states
- Summaries of monitoring visits conducted by the U.S. Department of Education with states receiving RLIS funding

Evaluation Questions

This study addresses the following evaluation questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the districts served by the RLIS program in terms of rural location, poverty, race, etc.?
2. What are the achievement trends in RLIS districts compared with other rural districts? Does receipt of an RLIS grant mitigate the relationship between district poverty and student achievement?
3. What progress have states made toward achieving their RLIS goals?
4. What are states' priorities for districts' use of RLIS grant funds? How do states administer and monitor the program? What guidance and assistance do states provide? How do states enforce the statutory accountability provisions?
5. What goals have districts identified for RLIS in their grant applications? What progress have districts made toward their goals? How have districts actually used RLIS funds?

This interim report contains findings and analyses that address evaluation questions 1 and 4. The final report will provide updated findings for questions 1 and 4 and findings for questions 2, 3, and 5.

Data Collection and Analysis

To address the evaluation questions, the study included the collection and analysis of interview and documentary data from a sample of states that received RLIS funding. The study also included an analysis of extant district demographic data.

State Interview and Document Data

To answer the questions on state priorities, program administration, and technical assistance, the evaluation included in-depth interviews and an analysis of extant state documents in nine of the 39 states that received RLIS funding in 2007–08 (see Exhibit 1). The interviews were conducted by telephone during the spring of the 2007–08 school year. The nine states in the sample are those receiving the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08. Together, these states accounted for 62 percent of RLIS funding in 2007–08. It is important to note that these nine states were selected to provide preliminary information about state priorities, program administration, and technical assistance and are not intended to represent state implementation across the 39 states receiving funding.

Exhibit 1
Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Funding for the Nine Sample States

State	2007–08 Funding	Total Funding From the RLIS Program (2002–03 Through 2007–08)
Texas	$7,512,087	$46,983,642
Georgia	$7,258,669	$44,189,109
Mississippi	$7,132,600	$38,948,841
Louisiana	$5,902,306	$30,418,735
Alabama	$5,769,468	$30,728,660
Kentucky	$5,715,636	$32,776,261
Oklahoma	$4,711,471	$26,258,242
North Carolina	$4,636,868	$27,460,336
West Virginia	$3,545,678	$22,131,007
Total (nine states)	$52,184,783	$299,894,833
TOTAL (all states)	**$84,458,880**	**$503,221,782**

Exhibit reads: The state of Texas received $7,512,087 in RLIS funding in 2007–08 and a total of $46,983,642 in RLIS funding from 2002–03 through 2007–08.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP).

In 2005–06, the nine states selected for the case study included 633 RLIS districts, compared with 555 RLIS districts in the rest of the country, and served 999,324 students, about 62 percent of all students in RLIS districts. In case study states, spending for all RLIS districts and economically disadvantaged populations within them differ slightly from those of RLIS districts in the rest of the country. In 2004–05, the average per-pupil spending was slightly lower in case study districts compared with RLIS districts in the rest of the country, with averages of $8,215 and $9,617, respectively. RLIS districts in the case study schools served a higher percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals; in 2005–06, approximately 64 percent of students in RLIS districts in the case study schools qualified for free or reduced-price meals compared with 59 percent in RLIS districts in the rest of the country.

A content analysis of interview transcripts, extant documents, and other background information was performed. A coding framework was developed to review all responses together and evaluate each response for possible relationships and for any significant variations. A classification matrix was used to organize extant state documents into categories of analysis, which grouped documents within a relational framework.

District-Level Extant Data

For this interim report, analysis of the extant data consisted of descriptive assessment of what RLIS districts have looked like over time and comparison of RLIS districts with districts nationally and other rural districts in the country. RLIS program data files were used to identify which districts were eligible for and received RLIS funds. In 28 of the 43 states that had ever received RLIS funding, all RLIS-eligible districts received funding in all six years of the program. The Common Core of Data (CCD), a federal program that annually collects data about all public schools, public school districts and state education agencies in the United States, provided district demographic information. The demographic data from CCD were used to compare RLIS districts descriptively with non-RLIS rural districts and all districts nationally.

Chapter 2: State Implementation of the RLIS Program

This chapter contains findings on state implementation of the RLIS program and progress toward RLIS goals. The findings are based on interviews with RLIS coordinators in the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08 and on review of RLIS-related documents obtained from the states. The interviews were conducted by telephone during the spring of the 2007–08 school year. It is important to note that these nine states were selected to provide preliminary information about state priorities, program administration and technical assistance and are not intended to represent state implementation across the 39 states receiving funding. Included in this chapter are comments by the RLIS coordinators in the sampled states that illustrate the findings or provide additional context.

Key Findings

Key findings on state implementation of the RLIS program include the following:

- In the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08, state coordinators reported that state goals for the program were consistent with federal goals that focus on improving student achievement and meeting AYP targets; the RLIS program was part of an overall effort in each state to manage federal programs to meet these goals.
- According to state coordinators, the nine states in the sample integrated RLIS into their ongoing school improvement activities to help districts and schools make AYP.
- State coordinators in all nine of the sampled states reported that the allocations of RLIS funds to districts were the last of their U.S. Department of Education funds to be finalized, which may affect a district's ability to do budget planning.
- According to state coordinators, all nine states in the sample required RLIS districts to engage in a comprehensive planning process and to address gaps identified through local needs assessments. Review of each state's RLIS-related documents by the researchers showed that there was considerable variability among the states with regard to the planning tools they used and to what extent they directed districts through the planning process.

State Implementation of the RLIS Program

Following are the findings from the analysis of the state interviews and of RLIS-related documents obtained from the states such as grant application and guidance materials, program data reports, evaluation reports and technical assistance materials. The State Coordinator Interview Guide used in conducting interviews in the nine sampled states is included in Appendix A.

Goals and Priorities

The primary goal of the RLIS program in the nine sampled states was for the districts in those states to make AYP. State coordinators in the nine states in the sample reported that helping rural school districts make AYP was the primary goal of their RLIS program (see Exhibit 2). State coordinators in two states reported that their states set additional goals for the RLIS program such as increasing National Assessment of Educational Progress scores or reducing dropout rates. However, the state coordinators in those two states explained that meeting AYP targets takes priority over any other goals, and districts with schools in school improvement status must direct their RLIS funds to helping that school make AYP.

Exhibit 2
State Goals for Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Funds

State	State RLIS Goal(s)
Alabama	Make AYP
Georgia	Make AYP
Kentucky	Make AYP
Louisiana	Make AYP
Mississippi	Make AYP Increase National Assessment of Educational Progress scores Reduce dropout rate
North Carolina	Make AYP
Oklahoma	Make AYP
Texas	Make AYP Increase achievement Reduce dropout rate
West Virginia	Make AYP

Exhibit reads: The state of Alabama has a state RLIS goal to make AYP.

Source: RLIS state coordinator interviews.

In the nine states in the sample, the only significant change in state goals over the course of the RLIS program was an increased emphasis on making AYP. RLIS funds are generally very flexible. However, if a district fails to make AYP after receiving these funds for three years, they may be used *only* for activities that will help the district make AYP. Once the program had been implemented for three years and some districts found themselves in school improvement status, there was an increased emphasis on the goal of making AYP in the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08.

According to the nine interviewed state coordinators, districts did not usually set goals for the RLIS program beyond those set by the state. According to state coordinators, districts usually identified, through a consolidated planning and application process, specific strategies and activities they would use to meet the state goal of making AYP. Thus, while the goal was the same as that of the state—for districts to make AYP—the strategies and activities that districts fund through RLIS to help them reach that goal varied. State coordinators explained that although districts may choose to address specific needs identified through a needs assessment process—for example, a need to help eighth graders improve mathematics achievement—addressing those needs would not usually be considered goals separate from the state goal of making AYP.

> *"The districts do not define specific goals, just the specific activities they have planned. Districts are allowed more flexibility in the use of their funds if they have made their AYP goals. If not, however, they are going to be tied to making sure that any funds go toward improving student achievement, toward closing the gaps, and toward making AYP."*

The nine interviewed state coordinators reported that their states viewed the RLIS program less as a separate program and more as a supplemental funding source to help rural schools meet their AYP targets. State coordinators in the nine states in the sample reported that their states used a variety of federal program funds to help schools improve student achievement and make AYP. In these states, RLIS was viewed as one of several federal funding sources available to help rural, low-income districts reach these goals.

> *"We have tried to assist those administrators by helping them to understand how to use the RLIS school funds to meet the goals of their districts and not look at each categorical funding stream from* NCLB *as a separate silo that doesn't touch any other silo—even in the small districts, the categorical nature of the funding makes people think in silos. We use RLIS to provide support for administrators to develop goals for counties based on the needs they have identified from a data-based analysis, and then we look at how they can use funding from the Department to meet their objectives. RLIS monies can be spread among a much broader list of categories. If districts need help in one program, they can target the money to those certain categories."*

In all nine of the sampled states, the RLIS program was integrated into the structure of the state education agency. The interviewed state coordinators reported that their states viewed RLIS funds as monies to be used by rural, low-income districts in conjunction with other federal

funds to improve student achievement and meet AYP targets. Indicative of states' efforts to help districts coordinate their funds to meet AYP targets, the states included in this study house the RLIS program (Title VI, Part B, Subpart 2) with other federal programs within the state education agency (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3
State Education Agency Organization

State	Division/Office Housing RLIS	Programs in This Division
Alabama	Federal Programs Section	Title I, II, III, V,VI, Even Start and 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Georgia	Title Programs	Title I, V, VI, X and 21st Century Community Learning Centers
Kentucky	Division of Federal Programs and Instructional Equity	Title I, V, VI and X
Louisiana	School and Community Support	Title IV, VI and 21st Century Learning Centers
Mississippi	Office of Innovative Support	Title I, II, III, IV, V, VI and X
North Carolina	Program Monitoring	Title I, V and VI
Oklahoma	Office of Federal Programs	Title I, II, V and VI
Texas	*No Child Left Behind* Program Coordination	Title I, II, III, V, VI, IX and Even Start
West Virginia	Office of Title II—Schools and School System Improvement	Title II, IV and VI

Exhibit reads: The state of Alabama houses the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) program in its Federal Programs Section that also includes Title I, II, III, V, VI, Even Start and 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Source: RLIS state coordinator interviews.

> *"The reason that Title I and RLIS funding are here [in the same office] is because they are a source of a lot of our thinking about how to improve school systems. When a district becomes identified for improvement, it causes us to look harder at how they are spending RLIS funds."*

Uses of RLIS Funds

Each of the nine states in which interviews were conducted allocated RLIS funds to all eligible districts in their states. By statute, states may award subgrants to eligible districts either by formula or competitively. The nine states included in this study allocated RLIS funds by formula to all eligible districts.

The nine states in the sample provided varying degrees of direction to districts in determining how to use RLIS funds to reach state goals. State coordinators in the interviewed states reported that their directions to districts on using RLIS funds to address identified needs ranged from simply restating the directions in the federal statute to encouraging districts to use RLIS funds to support specific activities such as professional development or leadership development.

> *"Our biggest goal is to make AYP, which is the intent of the grant itself. We try to work with districts to make sure that AYP is met each year.… If districts are able to meet their AYP goals, then they are allowed more flexibility in how the RLIS money is spent. If not, then I work with the districts to figure out why they aren't making their targets and determine how the funds should be allocated. If they are not making AYP, they need to spend the money on very specific things that will help them improve their status."*

> *"When you start talking about uses of funds, most of our districts, because of our guidance, have focused on professional development to ensure student goals are met.… The districts do not define specific goals, just the specific activities they have planned. Districts are allowed more flexibility in the use of their funds if they have made their AYP goals."*

State coordinators in the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08 reported that districts use RLIS funds in targeted ways to address specific areas of need. By statute (Section 6222 of the *ESEA*, as amended by *NCLB*), districts may use RLIS funds for the following:

- Teacher recruitment and retention
- Teacher professional development
- Educational technology as described in Part D of Title II
- Parental involvement activities
- Activities authorized under Part A of Title I (Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged)
- Activities authorized under Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students)

However, if a district fails to make AYP after receiving RLIS funding for three years, funds received from the RLIS program may be used only to carry out authorized improvement activities such as professional development, new curriculum, extended learning time, or full-scale restructuring (*ESEA*, Section 1116). The allocation of RLIS funds must be tied to the

district needs assessment and supported by the school improvement plan, and districts must indicate how RLIS funds will be targeted to areas of need to help them make AYP.

The interviewed state coordinators reported that they required districts to target RLIS funds to specific areas of need. Following the statute, they allowed districts a great deal of flexibility in their use of RLIS funds unless a district was in school improvement status in which case RLIS funds were *required* to be used to make AYP.

> *"When it comes time to approve how the districts allocate their funds, I will, in addition to reviewing the plan, pull up each district's electronic AYP report, which is a summary of performance measures, testing data, etc. for each school in the district. It includes every individual school by subject, content, year, etc. If a district did not make AYP, I try to find out why. I begin by looking at the scores in each content area and then drill down to the subgroups, for example, black males in math, and look at how the RLIS funds should be spent. In the past, I've forced people to change their entire budgets because of what I had found. It is a process that forces them to look at the data and allows me to help guide the districts."*

> *"Early on, there was a lot of desire on the part of districts to use money for Title II Part D (Ed Tech), to build infrastructure, acquire hardware, and conduct professional development. That has become less of an emphasis as more districts have become identified for improvement."*

Planning, Needs Assessment and Application Processes

State coordinators in all nine of the sampled states reported that the allocations of RLIS funds to districts were the last of their U.S. Department of Education funds to be finalized, which may affect a district's ability to do budget planning. State coordinators explained that the late date of the notification regarding which districts would receive an RLIS allocation was an issue primarily for districts that were close to the 20 percent poverty threshold for RLIS funding. Changes in a district's demographics or fluctuations in the method of calculating a district's poverty rate (using census data or an alternative method), may result in a borderline district falling above the poverty threshold one year and below the threshold the next. Such districts would not know their RLIS funding status at the time they put together their annual budgets (typically, by early summer). It is anticipated that the planned district-level data collection will provide a better understanding of this issue.

A comprehensive planning process was a critical component of efforts to help districts use federal funds effectively to make AYP in all of the nine sampled states. State coordinators in all nine of the sampled states reported that they encouraged districts to use all available federal funds to coordinate local efforts to improve student achievement and make AYP. All of the interviewed state coordinators reported that their state had a comprehensive planning process that was designed to help districts identify areas of need and select appropriate strategies across funding sources to address those needs. As reported by the state coordinators and verified by state documents, there was considerable variability among the nine states with regard to the planning tools they used and to what extent they directed districts through the planning process.

Seven of the nine states used a consolidated application for all federal funds, and four of those used an online application. The consolidated applications and comprehensive planning processes in these seven states described how federal funds, including RLIS funds, would be used together to implement and evaluate those strategies. In the two states that did not use a consolidated application, districts completed individual applications for each federal program, including RLIS.

> *"Everything is part of the comprehensive improvement process. They [the districts] identify their priority needs in their planning process and plan activities to carry out those goals. We have information on our Web site so districts can see what funds are appropriate for the uses defined. Each district must show their RLIS plans in a funding matrix. They would also have an itemized budget, so we would be able to see if RLIS is the funding source they are using. The comprehensive planning process is really ongoing. They can make changes at any point. It goes on at this time of year [spring], as they are planning for next year."*

Six of the nine states in the sample had a state-developed needs assessment process or tool to help districts identify their primary needs in relation to improving student achievement. As reported by the state coordinators and verified by the researchers, the nine states in the sample required districts to undertake a needs assessment to identify their needs in meeting AYP targets. State coordinators in the six states that had developed specific tools or processes to help districts prepare a needs assessment said that their objective was to help districts systematically align their needs and their budget to reach their AYP targets. State coordinators did not identify needs specific to rural districts other than the need for additional funds to help them reach federal and state goals.

Monitoring, Technical Assistance and Evaluation

All nine of the states in the sample held formal training sessions related to the RLIS program, which were offered through the state and, in some cases, regional service centers. All nine state coordinators reported that they offered formal training sessions related to the RLIS program, including statewide conferences, videoconferences and regional workshops. Review of RLIS-training materials from seven of the nine sampled states by the researchers showed that the training sessions explained the appropriate uses of RLIS funds, the application process, and the monitoring and reporting processes. State coordinators also reported that they communicated with districts one-on-one through telephone calls and e-mails as issues or questions arose.

> *"Yes, I provide the districts with TA [technical assistance] during the application process.… I also respond to district questions through e-mail and put out contact lists. There is definitely a lot of back and forth over what the districts are allowed to spend the money on."*

State monitoring procedures focused primarily on compliance with federal regulations and, in particular, on ensuring that expenditures were appropriate and allowable under federal regulations. As reported by the state coordinators and verified by the researchers, in eight of the nine states that received the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08, the monitoring process was

part of a comprehensive monitoring of all federal programs. Monitoring procedures took numerous forms, including ongoing budget monitoring, district self-assessment using a state-developed monitoring tool, and site visits by state monitors. Five of the nine states use a three-year site monitoring cycle, monitoring a third of the RLIS districts each year. Several state coordinators reported that they may make district visits based on AYP data. The monitoring site visits were used primarily to examine records and verify reported expenditures.

Data collection in the states in the interview sample was focused on the data necessary to complete the annual Comprehensive State Performance Report. Districts are required to submit an annual performance report describing the use of RLIS funds by the district; the report includes goals, target population, activities, performance indicators and evaluation. States then compile this information into a Comprehensive State Performance Report (CSPR), which is due to the U.S. Department of Education each year. State coordinators in the nine states reported that their data collection focus was on the data specifically required for completion of the CSPR.

By statute, districts are required to evaluate RLIS spending annually. These evaluations are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education as part of their CSPR. None of the state coordinators in the nine sampled states conducted additional evaluations on their own of the RLIS program in their state.

Related State Policies and Initiatives

There was little evidence that other federal or state initiatives that might be related to RLIS, such as those that address other rural issues, existed in the nine sampled states. State personnel responsible for the RLIS program reported working closely with others responsible for the implementation of other federal programs. While state RLIS coordinators in the nine states in the sample were deeply involved with U.S. Department of Education programs with similar goals to RLIS (i.e., making AYP), they were not aware of any other federal or state initiatives related to the issues faced by rural, low-income schools.

Chapter 3: Characteristics of RLIS-Funded Districts

This chapter presents information on the demographic characteristics of RLIS districts and compares those characteristics with those of the national average and the average of rural districts that did not qualify for RLIS funds. In contrast to Chapter 2, this chapter draws on data from all RLIS districts across the country, not just those in the nine case study states. The characteristics of students in RLIS districts remained relatively stable across the three years examined in this chapter, 2003–04 to 2005–06.

Key Findings

Key findings on district characteristics include the following:

- On average, RLIS districts had more students than other rural districts and fewer students than all districts nationally.
- RLIS districts were more concentrated in the South than other rural districts and districts nationally.
- Student-teacher ratios in RLIS districts were comparable with those nationally, but slightly higher than in other rural districts.
- Total per-pupil spending in RLIS districts slightly increased between 2003–04 and 2004 –05. However, per-pupil spending remained substantially lower in RLIS districts than in all districts nationally or in other rural districts.
- Compared with districts nationally, students in RLIS districts were more likely to be white, black, or American Indian/Alaskan Native and less likely to be Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander. Compared with other rural districts, RLIS districts were less likely to be white and more likely to be black or Hispanic.
- RLIS districts served a higher proportion of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals and a slightly higher proportion of students who had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) compared with districts nationally and non-RLIS rural districts.
- Students in RLIS districts were less likely to be limited English proficient than students nationally, but more likely to be limited English proficient than students in non-RLIS rural districts.

Data Sources

Extant data were analyzed from CCD and RLIS program data. The data files covered school years 2003–04 through 2006–07 and included a number of district-level variables regarding student population and performance data. Demographic data were analyzed for RLIS districts for each year of available data. Where applicable, demographic data were compared among RLIS districts; all U.S. school districts; and non-RLIS districts with NCES locale codes of 6, 7 or 8.

Although the data files included a number of common variables used annually by schools and districts, it was necessary to address several data limitations:

- Several districts did not report values for some of the variables. When they did not report information, these districts were not included in the analysis. Exhibit B-1 in Appendix B reports the total number of districts included in the data file for each school year. The number of districts that were missing values for the variables used in specific analyses can be determined by comparing the *N* reported for the analysis from the appropriate total number of districts reported in Exhibit B-1. For example, in 2004–05, 1,123 RLIS districts reported data on total district population (Exhibit B-2); 1,127 districts are included in the file (Exhibit B-1). Therefore, four RLIS districts were missing data regarding total district population.
- The data files did not include all of the same variables. One year of data, 2006–07, was excluded from some of the descriptive analyses because it did not include the variables of interest. However, the 2006–07 data (and only the 2006–07 data) *were* used for the descriptive analyses of student achievement data because that year was the most recent year of achievement data. In addition, one year of data, 2005–06, did not have a fall membership variable to represent the total student population in the districts. For this year, total population was calculated by summing the totals for grade levels (prekindergarten through Grade 12, including ungraded students). Whether or not this figure was an appropriate measure was determined by comparing the fall membership variables from 2003–04 and 2004–05 with the sums of the grade level totals for those years. As indicated in Exhibit B-3 in Appendix B, there were some minimal differences between the values. However, the differences were small enough that the grade-level totals were deemed appropriate for the analysis.

Comparison With Other Districts

Throughout this section, data on two groups of districts are presented to provide context for interpreting the data on RLIS districts. First, data are presented on non-RLIS rural districts. These rural districts (NCES locale code 6, 7 or 8) would not be eligible for the RLIS program for one of two reasons: (a) receiving funding through SRSA or (b) serving a district population with fewer than 20 percent of residents below the poverty line. Second, data are presented on all districts nationally. In 2006–07, approximately 7 percent of districts in the nation qualified for RLIS; similar percentages of districts qualified throughout the 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06 school years. Most of the data in this section are presented graphically. Data tables with additional information on these exhibits, including the number of cases included in each exhibit, can be found in Appendix B.

Characteristics of Districts

District Size

The total student population for all district types was about the same in each of the years from 2003–04 through 2005–06. During this period, RLIS districts had an average reported population of about 2,200 students, smaller than the national average of roughly 3,100 students. However, the average population of RLIS districts was larger than that of rural districts that did not qualify for RLIS funding (non-RLIS rural districts), which was about 1,100 students (see Exhibit 4). This difference between the average size of RLIS and non-RLIS rural districts is most likely a result of how the SRSA and RLIS programs determine program eligibility. Among the eligibility guidelines for SRSA is the requirement that a district serve no more than 600 students or serve only counties that have a population density of less than 10 persons per square mile.[4] RLIS program eligibility guidelines set no limits on district size, but they exclude districts that are eligible for SRSA funding. Roughly half of the non-RLIS rural districts qualified for SRSA. With at least half of the non-RLIS rural districts having fewer than 600 students, it stands to reason that the average district size would be lower than that of RLIS districts, which do not include the small districts that are eligible for SRSA funding.

However, it is important to note that, because of the wide ranges of district sizes in subsets, average district sizes should be interpreted with caution, particularly in making comparisons. For example, in 2005–06, reported student population sizes in RLIS districts ranged from 56 to 24,379 students, whereas districts nationwide ranged from 1 to 727,319 students.

Exhibit 4
Mean District Student Population, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

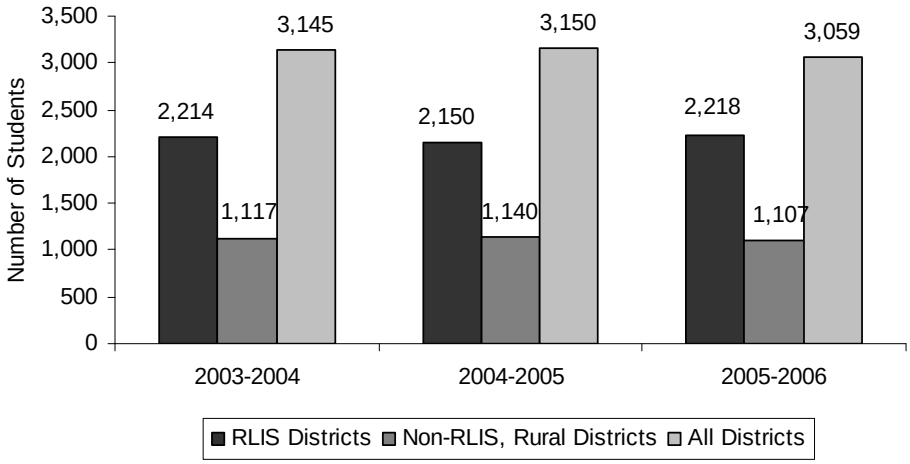


Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, the mean student population in districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds was 2,214, in 2004–05 it was 2,150, and in 2005–06 it was 2,218.

Source: Common Core of Data.

[4] In addition, a district must either include only schools that have NCES locale codes of 7 or 8 or meet its state's definition of "rural."

NCES Locale Designations

The distribution of RLIS districts across NCES locale codes also remained relatively stable across the years (see Appendix B). The majority of RLIS districts had a NCES locale code of either 6 or 7, with between 40 percent and 50 percent of districts in each year falling into each category. In 2005-06, about 11 percent of districts reported census locale codes of 8 (see Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Locale Codes,† RLIS Districts, 2005–06

	2005–06 *N* = 1,185	
Locale Codes	**Number of RLIS Districts**	**Percentage**
1-Large City	0	0%
2-Mid-Size City	0	0%
3-Urban Fringe of Large City	1	<1%
4-Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	0	0%
5-Large Town	1	<1%
6-Small Town	500	42%
7-Rural Outside CBSA/MSA	555	47%
8-Rural Inside CBSA/MSA	128	11%

Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, there were no Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts with an NCES locale code of 1.

Note: As shown in Exhibit 5, two RLIS districts have locale codes other than 6, 7 or 8. According to program staff members, these exceptions are likely the result of an anomaly in how two school districts are assigned locale codes in one state. CBSA/MSA stands for Core Based Statistical Area/Metropolitan Statistical Area.

† NCES categorizes local education authorities based on data provided by the census. The locale codes included in this analysis are (a) NCES locale code 6–Small Town is defined as "An incorporated place or Census-designated place with a population less than 25,000 and greater than or equal to 2,500 and located outside a CMSA or MSA"; (b) NCES locale code 7–Rural, Outside CBSA/MSA is defined as "Any territory designated as rural by the Census Bureau that is outside a CMSA or MSA of a Large or Mid-size City"; (c) NCES locale code 8–Rural, Inside CBSA/MSA is defined as "Any territory designated as rural by the Census Bureau that is within a CMSA or MSA of a Large or Mid-size City."

Source: Common Core of Data.

Region of the Country

Across the three school years of data, the distribution of RLIS districts across regions of the country remained relatively stable. The majority of RLIS districts, about 70 percent, were located in the South. The remaining RLIS districts were distributed roughly evenly across the remaining regions: the West, Midwest and Northeast (see Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6
Regional Distribution of RLIS Districts, 2005–06

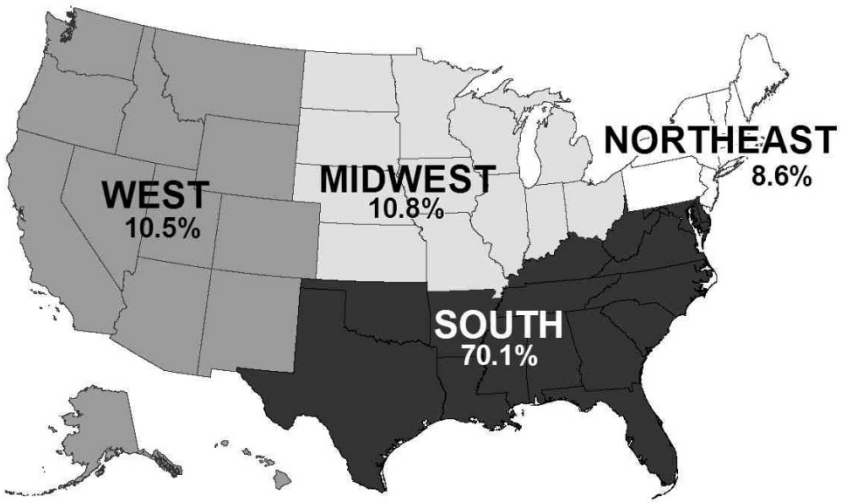


Exhibit reads: Most Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts (70 percent) are in the Southern region of the United States. The remaining 30 percent of RLIS districts are spread relatively evenly across the Northeast, Midwest and West.

Source: Common Core of Data.

About 37 percent of U.S. districts overall were located in the Midwest. About 20 percent of districts were located in each of the remaining regions. Compared with U.S. districts overall and non-RLIS rural districts, significantly higher percentages of RLIS districts were located in the South and lower percentages of RLIS districts were located in the remaining regions (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7
Regional Distribution of U.S. Districts, 2005–06

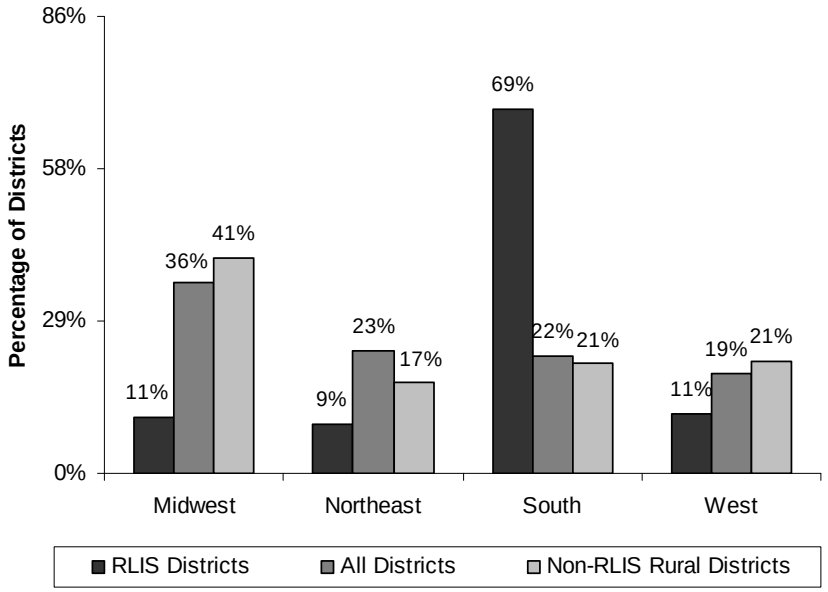


Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, 11 percent of Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts were located in the Midwest and West, 9 percent in the Northeast, and 69 percent in the South.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Student-Teacher Ratio

From 2003–04 to 2005–06, average student-teacher ratios in RLIS districts decreased slightly from 14.7 to 14.4 over the three years, while during the same period, the average ratios for all U.S. districts and non-RLIS rural districts remained about the same.[5] In 2005–06, the average student-teacher ratio for RLIS districts (14.4) was about the same as that of all U.S. districts (14.2). In contrast, the average ratio for non-RLIS rural districts was 13.1, lower than the averages for both RLIS districts and districts nationally (see Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8
Mean Student-Teacher Ratios, U.S. Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

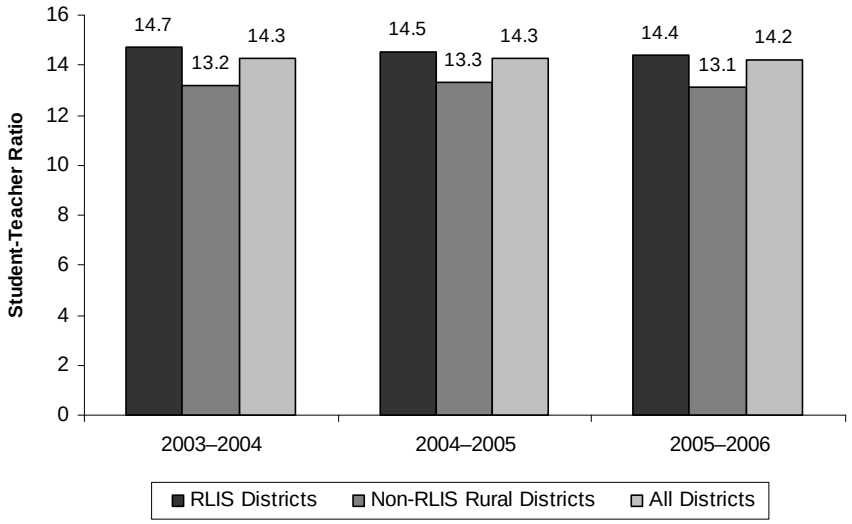


Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, the mean student-teacher ratio in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts was 14.7, in non-RLIS districts it was 13.2, and in all districts it was 14.3.

Source: Common Core of Data.

[5] Unlike other data presented in this chapter, the student-teacher ratio is presented with one decimal place because changes smaller than 1.0 in the student-teacher ratio can be viewed as substantively meaningful. In addition, because of a wide variance in reported student-teacher ratios, the sample was limited to those districts with ratios greater than zero but less than 50. Cases that reported a student-teacher ratio of 50 or higher represented less than 1 percent of the total cases. These cases are likely misreported and were thus excluded from the analysis.

Levels of Per-Pupil Spending

Average per-pupil spending increased slightly in RLIS districts between the 2003–04 and the 2004–05 school years, from $8,435 to $8,865. In 2004–05, average per-pupil spending in RLIS districts was lower than the average of all U.S. districts and the average of non-RLIS rural districts.[6] Total per-pupil expenditures in RLIS districts were just less than $9,000 in 2004–05, compared with more than $10,500 for the same year in other rural districts and districts nationally (see Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9
Average Per-Pupil Spending, U.S. Districts, 2003–04 Through 2004–05

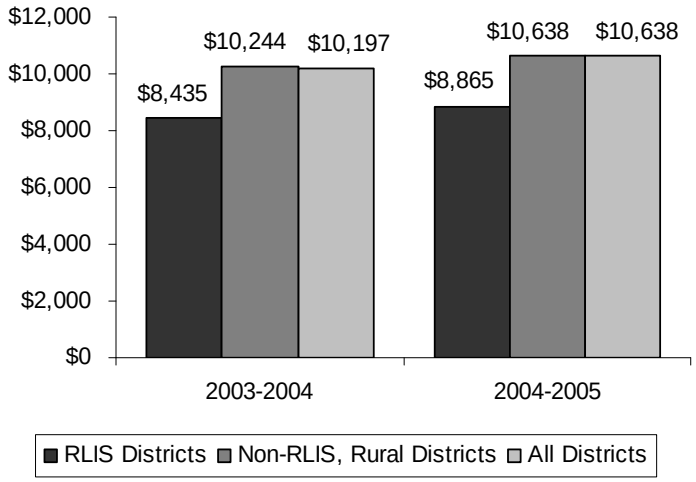


Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, the average per-pupil spending in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts was $8,435, in non-RLIS districts it was $10,244, and in all districts it was $10,197.

Note: The dollar amounts reported in this exhibit are actual; that is, they have not been adjusted for inflation.

Source: Common Core of Data.

[6] These differences in per-pupil expenditures are partially explained by the fact that RLIS districts are more likely to be found in the South, where per-pupil expenditures tend to be lower than in the rest of the United States. However, when examined by region, per-pupil expenditures in RLIS districts were found to be lower than those in other districts in each region. Exhibit B-11 and Exhibit B-12 in Appendix B report average per-pupil expenditures by region and district type.

Ethnic/Racial Make-up of Student Body

From the 2003-04 school year through the 2005-06 school year, the majority of students in RLIS districts were white in all three school years of data. As in the previous years, in 2005-06, about one-fourth of students in RLIS districts were black, and about one-tenth of students in RLIS districts were Hispanic (see Exhibit 10). Less than 5 percent of students in RLIS districts were American Indian, and less than 1 percent (rounded to 1 percent in Exhibit 10) were Asian.

In RLIS districts, the percentage of students representing certain racial/ethnic groups varied from those of U.S. districts overall and those of non-RLIS rural districts. Nevertheless, in 2005–06, across all three types of districts, the majority of students were white. However, RLIS districts reported a higher proportion of black students (24 percent) compared with non-RLIS rural districts (8 percent) and U.S. districts overall (17 percent). There was also a higher proportion of Hispanic students in RLIS districts (11 percent) compared with non-RLIS rural districts (8 percent). However, both RLIS and non-RLIS rural districts had lower proportions of Hispanic students than in U.S. districts overall (21 percent). RLIS districts served a similar percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students as other rural districts (1 percent), but a lower percentage than U.S. districts overall (5 percent). Conversely, RLIS districts served higher percentages of American Indian/Alaskan Native students (4 percent) than other rural districts (3 percent) and U.S. districts overall (1 percent).[7]

[7] An additional category of "Unknown" is included in this analysis to account for discrepancies between counts for racial/ethnic categories and district totals. As previously mentioned, the 2005–06 file did not include values for total students in the district. Totals were therefore calculated by summing the counts by grade. It was noted that the sum of the racial/ethnic categories was slightly less than the sum of the grades, suggesting there were some students not accounted for in the racial/ethnic categories. Therefore, the "Unknown" category was added to account for these uncategorized students.

Exhibit 10
Ethnic/Racial Make-Up of Student Body, 2005–06

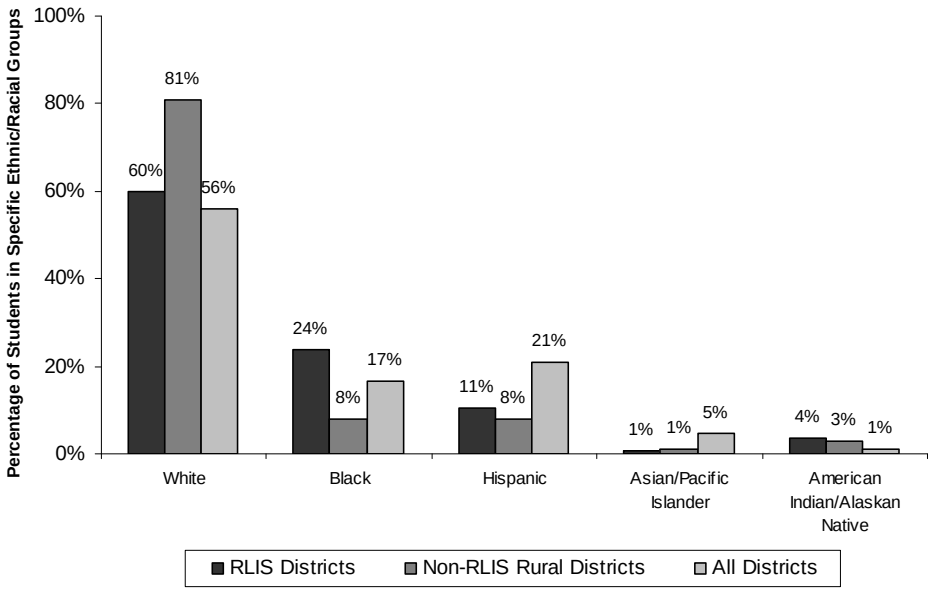


Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, white students constituted an average of 60 percent of the students in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts, an average of 81 percent in non-RLIS districts, and an average of 56 percent in all districts.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Proportion of Students Who Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

As expected, RLIS districts overall had a relatively large proportion of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals, even when compared with the other types of rural districts. More than 60 percent of students in RLIS districts qualified for free or reduced-price meals over the three-year period, with that percentage remaining relatively constant from 2003–04 to 2005–06. Compared with U.S. districts overall and non-RLIS rural districts, higher percentages of students in RLIS districts qualified for free or reduced-price meals. From 2003–04 to 2005–06, the percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals in other types of districts also remained relatively constant (see Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11
Average Percentage of Students Who Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Meals, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

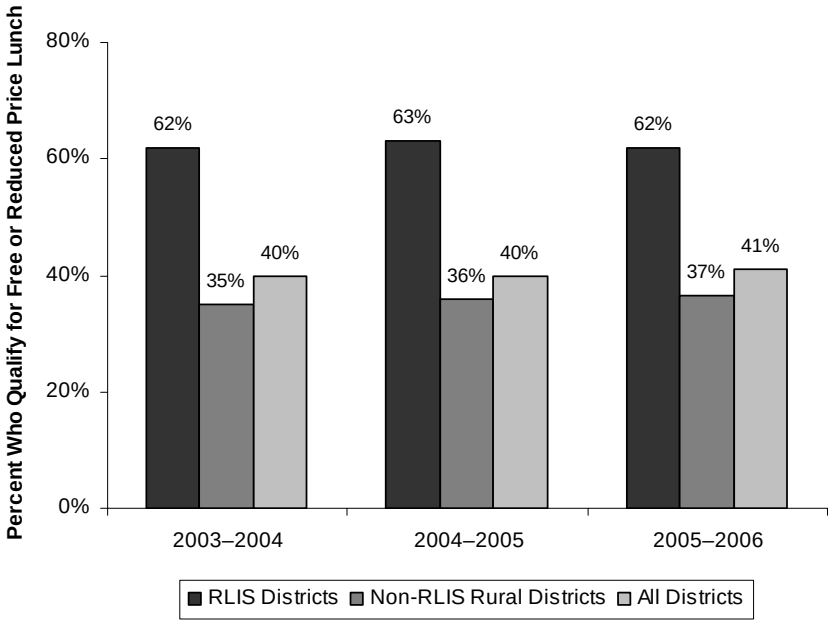


Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, an average of 62 percent of students in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts qualified for free or reduced-price meals, an average of 35 percent qualified in non-RLIS districts, and an average of 40 percent qualified in all districts.

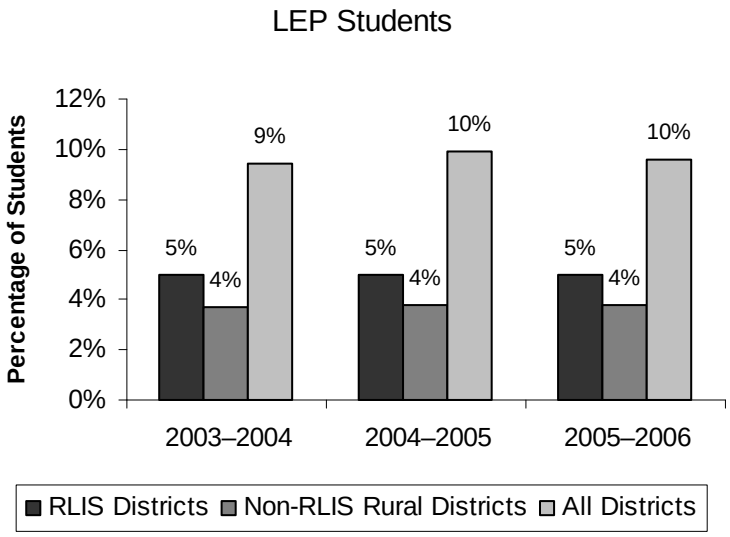
Source: Common Core of Data.

Special Populations

Across all three years of data, about 5 percent of students in RLIS districts were identified as limited English proficient. Compared with RLIS districts, U.S. districts overall had higher percentages of students identified as limited English proficient, though these students still accounted for about 10 percent of students nationally. In contrast, in non-RLIS rural districts, percentages of students identified as limited English proficient (4 percent) were slightly lower (than those (5 percent) in RLIS districts (see Exhibit 12).

Across all three years of data, between 14 percent and 15 percent of students in all three types of districts had an Individual Education Program. RLIS districts had a slightly higher proportion of students who had an IEP than that of all U.S. districts and non-RLIS rural districts (see Exhibit 12).

Exhibit 12
Average Proportion of Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students and Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), 2003–04 Through 2005–06



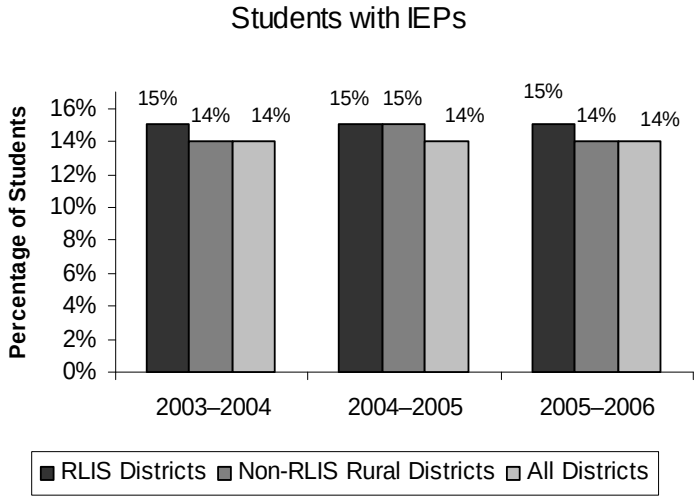


Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, an average of 5 percent of students in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts were limited English proficient (LEP). In that same year, an average of 15 percent of students in RLIS districts had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Source: Common Core of Data.

AYP Status

As was discussed above, one of the primary goals of the RLIS program is to provide support to districts as they strive to make AYP. According to data collected by the program office, 54 percent of RLIS districts made AYP in 2005–06. A more thorough investigation of the progress of RLIS districts toward making AYP will be included in the final evaluation report.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

This interim report includes findings on state implementation of the RLIS program and demographic characteristics of RLIS districts. The final report will include an analysis of student achievement and will incorporate additional information from state surveys on state implementation and from district interviews and surveys on implementation by RLIS districts.

The interviews with state coordinators in the nine states receiving the largest RLIS allocations in 2007–08 indicated that states did not view RLIS as a separate program for rural schools, but as an additional funding source to help rural, low-income schools meet their AYP targets. There were few differences in the nine states' administrative practices (e.g., how states distribute and monitor funds, state monitoring and compliance procedures for RLIS districts, etc.) and there was little evidence of challenges faced by states in implementing the program. The one challenge that was consistently mentioned was that RLIS is the last of the federal grant allocations to be finalized, which may affect a district's ability to plan for the use of the funds.

In most of the nine states, RLIS was integrated into the state's consolidated planning and application process for federal programs; in these cases, districts must show how they will use various funding sources to address identified needs and meet student achievement goals. Representatives from all nine states reported providing training and technical assistance to districts on the RLIS program and application process. In particular, the sampled states provided districts with technical assistance in identifying specific needs for improvement and in using this program effectively.

Characteristics of RLIS districts have remained relatively stable over the years of the program's implementation. RLIS districts tend to have more students than other rural districts, but fewer students than districts nationally. Consistent with program goals, RLIS districts serve a higher proportion of students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals than districts overall or non-RLIS rural districts. Despite receiving RLIS funding, per-pupil spending in RLIS districts remains substantially lower than per-pupil funding in all districts nationally or other rural districts.

These findings will be further expanded in another round of analysis, and presented in a final report, which will provide a comprehensive review of the implementation of the RLIS program. The final report will include additional data collection—an online survey of the states and districts receiving RLIS funding and in-depth interviews with a sample of 45 districts receiving RLIS funding—and analysis of extant data at the state and district levels on student achievement outcomes from state assessments used for NCLB accountability.

APPENDIX A
Evaluation of the Implementation of the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Program
STATE COORDINATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

1. How long have you been the RLIS/REAP state coordinator?

   NOTE: IF THE STATE COORDINATOR HAS BEEN IN THE JOB SIX MONTHS OR LESS, ASK: Is the previous state coordinator available for us to talk to if there are questions that should more appropriately be answered by him or her?

   - *(If yes)* Could you let us know if we come to any such questions, so we can ask them of the previous state coordinator instead?

   - *(If no)* Could you please go ahead and answer any such questions to the best of your ability? We understand if your knowledge of past decisions or activities is incomplete.

2. Please describe your role and responsibilities in administering the RLIS Program.

3. Have your role and/or responsibilities changed over time? *(If so)* Please describe.

Goals and Priorities

Next, we would like to ask about the goals and priorities of your state's RLIS Program.

4. What are the current goals and priorities of your state's RLIS Program?

   PROBE:

   - Are the current goals and priorities of your state's RLIS Program intended to address specific challenges faced by rural districts in your state?

5. Have the goals and priorities of your state's RLIS Program changed over time? *(If yes)* What goals changed, and why?

6. Are future reassessments of your state's goals planned? *(If yes)* Who would be involved in doing such a reassessment? How would such a reassessment be done?

7. Do the RLIS-funded districts in your state set their own goals and priorities distinct from those established by the state program? *(If yes)* How do the districts communicate these goals and priorities to you?

Administration

Next, we would like you to describe how the distribution of RLIS funds is administered.

8. How do you notify RLIS-eligible districts as to their eligibility for funds? Have your communication mechanisms changed over time?

9. How does the process by which RLIS funds are distributed to eligible districts fit in with your overall policies and procedures for School Support and Technology Programs and other programs for LEAs?

10. Does your state require the eligible districts to submit an application for or otherwise make a formal request for the RLIS funds? *(If yes)* Please describe the application/request process that must be followed by the districts.

11. Does the state provide any guidance and assistance for eligible districts for completing the application process?

12. Has your process for the distribution of RLIS funds changed over time? *(If yes)* How?

State Monitoring, Technical Assistance and Evaluation

Now, we would like to ask you some questions regarding your state's processes for monitoring and evaluating the RLIS Program.

13. Do you provide districts with information on the application process, the state's goals and priorities, or guidance on the RLIS Program in general? *(If yes)* Can you share those documents with us?

14. How do you monitor your state's RLIS Program?

15. Do you provide any forms of technical assistance to RLIS districts? *(If yes)* What types of assistance do you offer? Can you share any technical assistance-related documents with us?

16. Have data on the RLIS Program been collected? *(If yes)* Which types? Can you share any of your raw data with us?

    PROBE:

    - How often are data collected and analyzed?
    - How do you use the data you collect?
    - What staff members are responsible for collecting and analyzing data?

17. Do you conduct evaluations of your state's RLIS Program? *(If yes)* How so? Have you generated any reports or self-evaluations? *(If yes)* Can you share them with us? What have the reports found?

Related State Policies and Initiatives

18. Are there any policy initiatives or funding sources in your state that support, complement or supplement the RLIS Program? (If yes) Can you describe them for me?

    PROBE:

    - How are these programs coordinated at the state level?

    - Does the state provide guidance and assistance to districts to help them effectively coordinate the funds available from these various programs?

19. Are there any policy initiatives or funding sources in your state that compete with the RLIS Program? *(If yes)* Can you describe them for me?

Wrap-Up

20. Now that you understand the types of information we are looking for, is there anything else you think we should know about your state's RLIS Program? Do you have any suggestions for improvement of the RLIS Program?

21. I want to confirm that you are going to e-mail/mail me the following documents that we discussed in the interview: *(list documents, such as program data, evaluation data, reports, guidance, etc.)* When should I expect those documents?

22. Do you have any questions about the study?

    Thank you for your time!

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) Program
COVER PAGE FOR STATE COORDINATOR INTERVIEW

Note: The interview will be scheduled and our study introduced and explained in a set-up call in advance of the interview itself. We will, however, want to review some or all of this information at the time of the interview.

Hello. This is *[name]*, from Berkeley Policy Associates. As we discussed (*refer to last time we spoke)* we are conducting a study under contract with the Policy and Program Studies Service of the U.S. Department of Education to learn about how the Rural and Low-Income School Program is being implemented at the state and local levels. We are particularly interested in learning about your goals and priorities, and uses of funds. As you know, you are one of nine states that have been selected for an in-depth interview regarding your state's RLIS Program. The information you provide will also inform subsequent data collection activities.

(*Refer to discussion of interview length held during set-up call*.) Our interview will take about one hour. Is this still a good time for you? *(Negotiate new time or divide interview into two sessions as needed.)* Thank you so much for your time; we know how busy you must be.

Please be as honest and candid as possible. Any information regarding your successes and challenges will help us understand the overall picture, and we especially appreciate learning about your experiences—both positive and negative. In our reporting, we will not associate responses or findings with individual names or the names of the states.

We have two interviewers on the line, one asking the questions and the other taking notes, who may ask questions as well. We would like to make a recording of the conversation as a back-up to our note taking; this recording would be erased as soon as we have verified that our notes are complete. Do we have your permission to record our conversation?

There will be time for you to ask questions about the study at the end of the interview, but if you need anything clarified during our discussion, please let us know. Are you ready to begin? *(Note: Prior to the interview, we will review written materials on the particular state, and tailor the topic guide slightly as appropriate.)*

APPENDIX B: SUPPORTING DATA FOR CHAPTER 3
Demographic Data for RLIS, Non-RLIS Rural, and All U.S. Districts

The tables below provide supporting data for the Exhibits presented in Chapter 3 of the text. Additional demographic data are presented, along with the number of cases included in each figure.

Exhibit B-1
Total Districts in Data Files, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

Districts	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
RLIS Districts	1,299	1,127	1,188
All Districts	17,521	17,804	17,940
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,789	8,835	8,424

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 1,299 districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds reported data; in 2004–05, 1,127 RLIS districts reported data; and in 2005–06, 1,188 RLIS districts reported data.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-2
District Student Population, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04			
Districts	***N***	**Mean**	**Max.**	**Standard Deviation**
RLIS Districts	1,297	2,214	24,056	2,009.3
All Districts	15,335	3,145	1,041,976	14,324.0
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,492	1,117	40,382	2,057.5

	2004–05			
Districts	***N***	**Mean**	**Max.**	**Standard Deviation**
RLIS Districts	1,123	2,150	24,268	2,011.4
All Districts	15,391	3,150	1,032,485	14,264.9
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,560	1,140	41,205	2,087.6

	2005–06			
Districts	***N***	**Mean**	**Max.**	**Standard Deviation**
RLIS Districts	1,188	2,218	24,379	2,057.0
All Districts	16,241	3,059	727,319	12,165.0
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,423	1,107	42,035	2,126.8

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 1,297 districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds reported student population information. For those districts, the mean district size was 2,214 students, with a maximum of 24,056.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-3
Fall Membership and Sum of Grade Level Totals, 2003–04 Through 2004–05

	2003–04		2004–05	
Districts	**Fall Membership**	**Sum of Grade Level Totals**	**Fall Membership**	**Sum of Grade Level Totals**
RLIS Districts	2,872,011	2,863,106	2,414,494	2,403,049
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	9,487,085	9,588,749	9,759,788	9,807,602
All U.S. Districts	48,221,532	49,227,340	48,477,478	49,387,565

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts reported a total fall membership of 2,872,011. The sum of the grade level totals for RLIS districts in 2003–04 was 2,863,106.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-4
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Locale Codes, RLIS Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

Locale Codes	**2003–04** *N* **= 1,297**		**2004–05** *N* **= 1,124**		**2005–06** *N* **= 1,185**	
	N	**Percentage**	***N***	**Percentage**	***N***	**Percentage**
1-Large City	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2-Mid-Size City	6	1%	0	0%	0	0%
3-Urban Fringe of Large City	29	2%	0	0%	1	0%
4-Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	42	3%	0	0%	0	0%
5-Large Town	5	0%	0	0%	1	0%
6-Small Town	500	39%	482	43%	500	42%
7-Rural Outside CBSA/MSA	571	44%	531	47%	555	47%
8-Rural Inside CBSA/MSA	144	11%	111	10%	128	11%

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 2004–05, and 2005–06, no Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts had a locale code of 1-Large City.

Note: RLIS eligibility is determined by a district's NCES locale code of two years earlier. This table presents district locale codes for the school year in which funds were received, which may explain the existence of RLIS districts with a locale code other than 6, 7 or 8. CBSA/MSA stands for Core Based Statistical Area/Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-5
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Locale Codes, U.S. Districts, 2005–2006

Locale Codes	RLIS Districts *N* = 1,185		All Districts *N* = 15,746		Non-RLIS rural Districts *N* = 8,424	
	N	**Percentage**	***N***	**Percentage**	***N***	**Percentage**
1-Large City	0	0%	941	6%	0	0%
2-Mid-Size City	0	0%	978	6%	0	0%
3-Urban Fringe of Large City	1	0%	2,585	16%	0	0%
4-Urban Fringe of Mid-Size City	0	0%	1,502	10%	0	0%
5-Large Town	1	0%	133	1%	0	0%
6-Small Town	500	42%	1,688	11%	1,188	14%
7-Rural Outside CBSA/MSA	555	47%	5,250	33%	4,695	56%
8-Rural Inside CBSA/MSA	128	11%	2,669	17%	2,541	30%

Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, no districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds had a locale code of 1-Large City. Nationwide, 941 districts (about 6 percent) had a locale code of 1-Large City, and no non-RLIS rural districts had a locale code of 1-Large City. CBSA/MSA stands for Core Based Statistical Area/Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-6
Regional Distribution of RLIS Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04 *N* = 1,298		2004–05 *N* = 1,126		2005–06 *N* = 1,188	
Region	**Total**	**Percentage**	**Total**	**Percentage**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Midwest	187	14%	135	12%	128	11%
Northeast	119	9%	102	9%	102	9%
South	850	66%	777	69%	833	70%
West	142	11%	112	10%	125	11%

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 187 districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds were located in the Midwest, about 14 percent of RLIS districts. In 2004–05, 135 districts that received RLIS funds were located in the Midwest, about 12 percent of RLIS districts. In 2005–06, 128 districts that received RLIS funds were located in the Midwest, about 11 percent of RLIS districts.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-7
Regional Distribution of U.S. Districts, 2005–06

	RLIS Districts *N* = 1,188		All Districts *N* = 17,755		Non-RLIS Districts, Rural *N* = 8,407	
Region	**Total**	**Percentage**	**Total**	**Percentage**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Midwest	128	11%	6,512	37%	3,523	42%
Northeast	102	9%	4,006	23%	1,423	17%
South	833	70%	3,904	22%	1,746	21%
West	125	11%	3,333	19%	1,715	20%

Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, 128 districts that received Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) funds were located in the Midwest, about 11 percent of RLIS districts. Nationally, 6,512 school districts, about 37 percent, were located in the Midwest. Of non-RLIS rural districts, 3,523, about 42 percent, were located in the Midwest.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-8
Student-Teacher Ratios, RLIS Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04 *N* = 1,289	2004–05 *N* = 1,076	2005–06 *N* = 1,173
Mean	14.7	14.5	14.4
Standard Deviation	2.3	2.2	2.2

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, the average student-teacher ratio for Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts was 14.7 students per teacher, with a standard deviation of 2.3.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-9
Student-Teacher Ratios, U.S. Districts, 2005–06

	RLIS Districts *N* = 1,173	All Districts *N* = 15,514	Non-RLIS Districts, Rural *N* = 8,295
Mean	14.4	14.2	13.1
Standard Deviation	2.2	4.3	4.0

Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, the average student-teacher ratio for RLIS districts was 14.4 students per teacher, with a standard deviation of 2.2.

Note: Because of a wide variance in reported student-teacher ratios, the sample was limited to those districts with ratios greater than zero but less than 50. Cases that reported a student-teacher of 50 or higher represented less than 1 percent of the total cases. These cases are likely misreported and were thus excluded from the analysis.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-10
Average Per-Pupil Spending, RLIS Districts, 2003–04 Through 2004–05

Expenditure Categories	2003–04 *N* = 1,297	2004–05 *N* = 1,123
Elementary-Secondary	$7,461	$7,963
Instruction	$4,523	$4,804
Support Services	$2,525	$2,723
Other Elementary-Secondary Programs	$414	$436
Salary	$4,650	$4,885
Benefits	$1,316	$1,424
Capital Outlay	$756	$684
Non Elementary-Secondary Programs	$66	$69
Average Total Expenditures	$8,435	$8,865

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, the average per-pupil spending on elementary-secondary programs in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts was $7,461; in 2004–05, it was $7,963.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-11
Average Per-Pupil Spending, U.S. Districts, 2004–05

Expenditure Categories	RLIS Districts *N* = 1,123	All Districts *N* = 15,391	Non-RLIS Districts, Rural *N* = 8,560
Elementary-Secondary	$7,963	$9,344	$9,417
Instruction	$4,804	$5,576	$5,676
Support Services	$2,723	$3,391	$3,332
Other Elementary-Secondary Programs	$436	$377	$409
Salary	$4,885	$5,468	$5,530
Benefits	$1,424	$1,675	$1,685
Capital Outlay	$684	$920	$856
Non Elementary-Secondary Programs	$69	$87	$64
Average Total Expenditures	$8,865	$10,638	$10,638

Exhibit reads: In 2004–05, the average per-pupil spending on elementary-secondary programs in RLIS districts was $7,963.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-12
Average Per-Pupil Spending by Region, 2004–05

Regions	RLIS Districts	All Districts	Non-RLIS Districts, Rural
Midwest	$9,118	$9,777	$9,637
Northeast	$12,406	$13,599	$13,131
South	$8,266	$9,013	$9,406
West	$9,492	$11,113	$12,097
U.S. Average	$8,865	$10,638	$10,638

Exhibit reads: In Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts in the Midwest, the average per-pupil spending was $9,118; among all districts in the Midwest, it was $9,777; and in non-RLIS rural Midwest districts, it was $9,637.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-13
Ethnic/Racial Make-Up of Student Body, RLIS Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04 *N* = 1,259 Districts		2004–05 *N* = 1,087 Districts		2005–06 *N* = 1,188 Districts	
Race/Ethnicity	**Total Students**	**Percentage**	**Total Students**	**Percentage**	**Total Students**	**Percentage**
White	1,641,049	57%	1,344,630	56%	1,585,494	60%
Black	693,678	24%	577,175	24%	625,830	24%
Hispanic	291,358	10%	279,449	12%	301,571	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	15,401	1%	12,327	1%	14,882	1%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	114,333	4%	93,927	4%	101,270	4%
Unknown	116,192	4%	106,986	4%	6,004	0%
Total Student Population	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,635,051	100%
Fall Membership	2,872,011	100%	2,414,494	100%	n/a	n/a

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, there were 1,641,049 white students in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts, about 57 percent of total students; in 2004–05, there were 1,344,630, about 56 percent; and in 2005–05, there were 1,585,494, about 60 percent.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-14
Ethnic/Racial Make-Up of Student Body, U.S. Districts, 2005–06

	RLIS Districts *N* = 1,188 Districts		Non-RLIS Districts, Rural *N* = 8,423 Districts		All Districts *N* = 16,423 Districts	
Race/Ethnicity	**Total Students**	**Percentage**	**Total Students**	**Percentage**	**Total Students**	**Percentage**
White	1,585,494	60%	7,521,014	81%	27,785,770	56%
Black	625,830	24%	704,182	8%	8,397,098	17%
Hispanic	301,571	11%	716,382	8%	10,217,861	21%
Asian/Pacific Islander	14,882	1%	101,472	1%	2,307,034	5%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	101,270	4%	232,929	3%	645,147	1%
Unknown	6,004	0%	43,816	1%	335,373	1%
Total Student Population	2,635,051	100%	9,319,795	100%	49,688,283	100%

Exhibit reads: In 2005–06, there were 1,585,494 white students in Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts, about 60 percent of total students; there were 7,521,014 white students in non-RLIS districts, rural, about 81 percent; and there were 27,785,770 white students in all districts, about 56 percent.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-15
Students Who Qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Meals, U.S. Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify**	**Percent of Students Who Qualify**
RLIS Districts	1,122	2,492,878	1,539,817	62%
All Districts	13,845	43,611,863	17,535,650	40%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	7,887	8,644,497	3,040,172	35%

	2004–05			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify**	**Percent of Students Who Qualify**
RLIS Districts	1,003	2,137,532	1,354,777	63%
All Districts	13,978	45,314,142	18,135,119	40%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,072	9,174,763	3,332,410	36%

	2005–06			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify**	**Percent of Students Who Qualify**
RLIS Districts	1,184	2,629,420	1,639,082	62%
All Districts	15,626	48,648,060	20,377,284	42%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,157	9,208,075	3,402,821	37%

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 1,122 Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts reported data on both total student population and students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. In those districts, there were 2,492,878 total students and 1,539,817 students who qualified for free or reduced-price meals, about 62 percent of total students.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-16
Students Who Are Limited English Proficient (LEP), U.S. Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify as LEP**	**Percentage of Students Who Qualify as LEP**
RLIS Districts	1,157	2,641,166	124,477	5%
All Districts	12,923	40,512,731	3,819,470	9%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	7,397	8,007,678	297,330	4%

	2004–05			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify as LEP**	**Percentage of Students Who Qualify as LEP**
RLIS Districts	1,024	2,244,961	110,384	5%
All Districts	12,438	39,318,402	3,898,520	10%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	7,381	8,178,601	306,824	4%

	2005–06			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify as LEP**	**Percentage of Students who Qualify as LEP**
RLIS Districts	1,102	2,470,131	123,262	5%
All Districts	13,989	42,813,970	4,120,779	10%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	7,284	8,080,146	308,083	4%

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 1,157 Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts reported data on both total student population and the number of students who qualified as LEP. In those districts, there were 2,641,166 students total and 124,477 students qualifying as LEP, about 5 percent of students total.

Source: Common Core of Data.

Exhibit B-17
Students With Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), U.S. Districts, 2003–04 Through 2005–06

	2003–04			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify (IEP)**	**Percentage of Students Who Qualify (IEP)**
RLIS Districts	1,241	2,795,666	429,531	15%
All Districts	14,614	45,372,370	6,149,728	14%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,184	9,100,063	1,313,385	14%

	2004–05			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify (IEP)**	**Percentage of Students Who Qualify (IEP)**
RLIS Districts	1,039	2,300,857	353,549	15%
All Districts	13,546	43,371,565	5,911,083	14%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	7,742	8,960,685	1,302,461	15%

	2005–06			
Districts	***N***	**Total Student Population**	**Students Who Qualify (IEP)**	**Percentage of Students Who Qualify (IEP)**
RLIS Districts	1,187	2,634,120	388,706	15%
All Districts	16,080	48,563,003	6,628,190	14%
Non-RLIS Rural Districts	8,374	9,267,725	1,314,911	14%

Exhibit reads: In 2003–04, 1,241 Rural and Low-Income School (RLIS) districts reported data on both total student population and the number of students with IEPs. In those districts, there were 2,795,666 students total and 429,531 students with IEPs, about 15 percent of total students.

Source: Common Core of Data.

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

www.ed.gov