



Wide-Open Spaces: Schooling in Rural America Today

December 2019

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Introduction

Fourteen percent of the nation's population lives in rural communities, and one in five K-12 students attends a rural school. This is a substantial portion of the population, but it's far too often overlooked by education analysts, advocates, and policymakers. When rural education is addressed, the discussion is too often focused on the challenges facing those communities.

To be sure, education policy and practice in rural communities must take into account broader community factors, such as limited economic opportunity, poor access to healthcare, and social challenges, like drug addiction. But focusing exclusively on these challenges overlooks key assets that can help create and sustain meaningful change in rural schools. Compared to communities in other geographies, rural communities tend to place high value on civic and community engagement, have high rates of volunteering and participation in community life, and have tight-knit networks of support. Community members tend to have a deep sense of and commitment to place that dates back generations. And at a state and national level, rural communities represent a powerful political voice.

Moreover, rural communities are incredibly diverse, both economically and racially. Some of the country's most impoverished areas are communities with significant minority populations in the rural South, along the U.S.-Mexico border, and on Native American reservations throughout the West. Those focused on improving outcomes for low-income and minority students simply cannot continue to overlook rural America.

The purpose of this deck is to provide an overview of the state of rural communities and schools. It aims to equip advocates, decision-makers, and other stakeholders with a shared understanding of rural education to generate a more accurate and nuanced policy response.

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Executive Summary

Overview of Rural America

Rural communities:

- Vary widely in their location, economies, and strengths and challenges
- Tend to have higher rates of poverty, lower median household incomes, and lower levels of educational attainment on average than urban areas
- Struggle with persistent social challenges and lack of access to amenities
- Have higher rates of economic mobility in some places than urban areas

Education in Rural America

Rural schools:

- Face common challenges like declining enrollment, high rates of poverty, and a lack of human capital and adequate transportation
- Face unique challenges, including urban-centric policy structures, low economies of scale, and access to fewer courses and other community assets
- Tend to slightly lag behind suburban schools and outperform city and town schools, though achievement gaps across race and income levels persist
- Send students to two-year college programs at similar rates as schools in other geographies, but trail suburban schools in enrollment in four-year programs

Looking Ahead

Rural communities:

- Can harness individual, organizational, civic, cultural, and historical assets to create a shared vision of the future
- Can capitalize on deep relationships, a high degree of self-reliance, and flexibility and creativity to move toward a common goal
- Can take advantage of increased focus on their needs by partnering with economic development organizations, nonprofits, and philanthropic institutions

Government agencies define “rural” differently; there is not a single agreed-upon way to identify rural communities

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

NCES uses an “urban-centric” classification system with four major locale categories: city, suburban, town, and rural. All categories are further subdivided; “rural” has three subcategories: fringe, distant, and remote.

U.S. Census Bureau

The Census Bureau defines “rural” as encompassing all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

OMB designates counties as “Metropolitan,” “Micropolitan,” or “Neither,” and considers all counties that are not part of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) as rural.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Services (ERS)

ERS typically studies conditions in nonmetropolitan counties, which include some combination of: counties that are not part of larger labor market areas, open countryside, rural towns, and urban areas with populations below 50,000.

The wide variety in definitions complicates our analysis of rural America, but to use just one definition would place significant limits on the breadth of our understanding. We therefore draw on a wide range of sources that use all of the above definitions but refrain from comparing information between sources that use different definitions.

Note: The slides that follow represent “rural” data using the definition of the data source.

Sources: [NCES](#); [USDA](#) (2016); [HRSA](#) (2018)

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Overview of Rural America

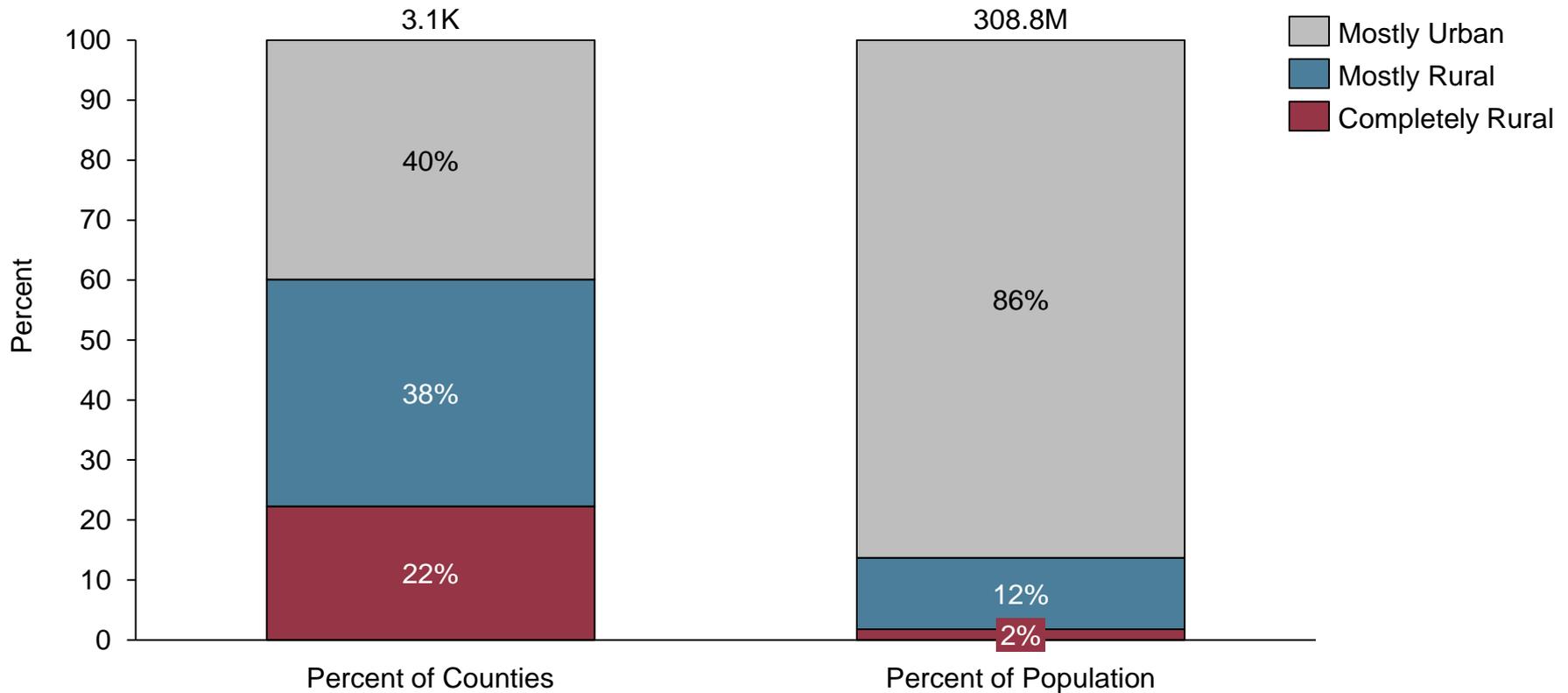
Education in Rural America

Looking Ahead

Nationwide, 60% of counties are mostly or completely rural; these counties are home to 14% of the population

Percent of Total Counties and Total Population

By county type, 2010



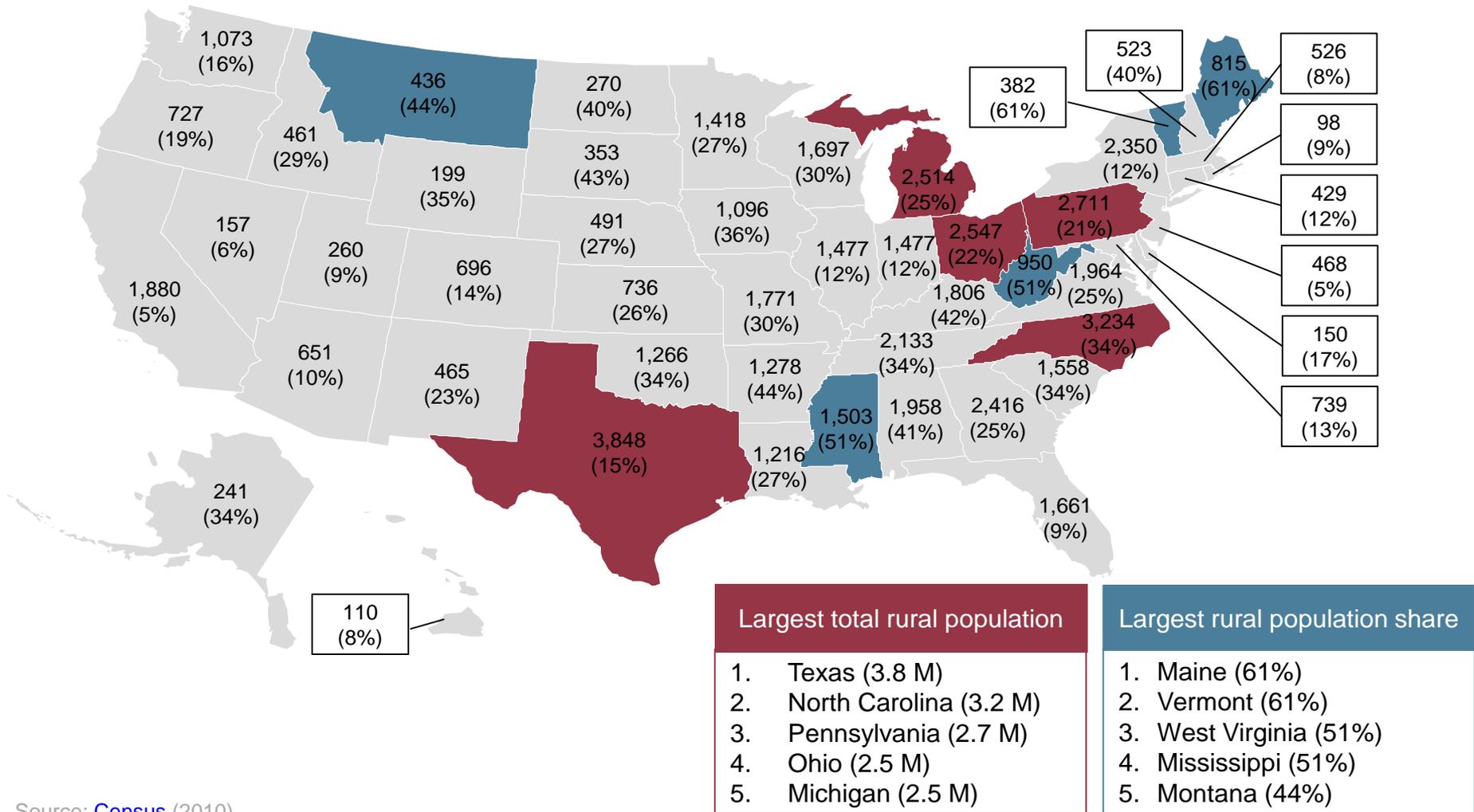
Note: Counties with 50% to 99.9% of the population living in rural areas are considered “mostly rural”; those with 100% rural population are considered “completely rural.”

Source: [Census](#) (2010)

The number of people and percent of the population living in rural counties vary by state

Total Rural Population (in thousands) and Rural Population Share

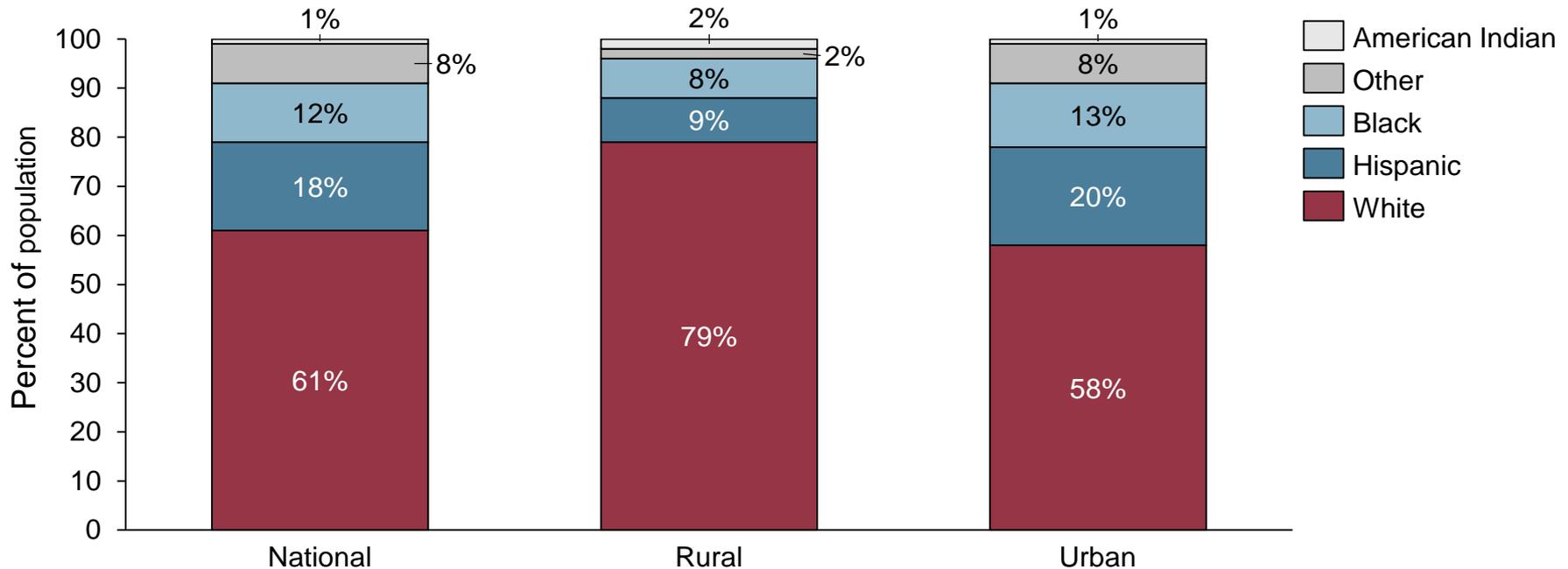
By state, 2010



Though primarily white, residents of rural communities come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds

Population Demographics

By location, 2017

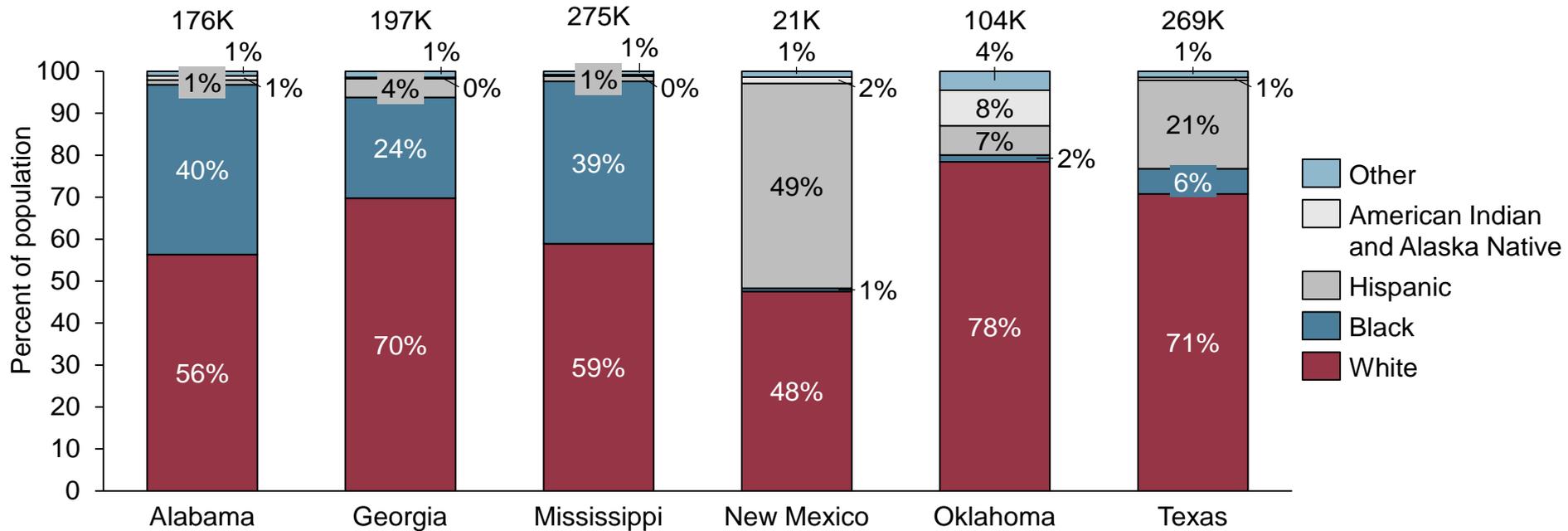


The population in rural areas is much less diverse than in urban areas; nearly 80% of America's rural population is white, compared to 61% nationally and 58% in urban communities.

In many Southern states, minority groups make up substantial shares of the rural population

Population Demographics of Completely Rural Counties

By state, 2010



There is substantial demographic variation across states. For example, a plurality of residents in New Mexico's most rural counties are Hispanic, 40% of residents in completely rural counties in Alabama are black, and 8% of residents in completely rural counties in Oklahoma are of American Indian or Native Alaskan descent.

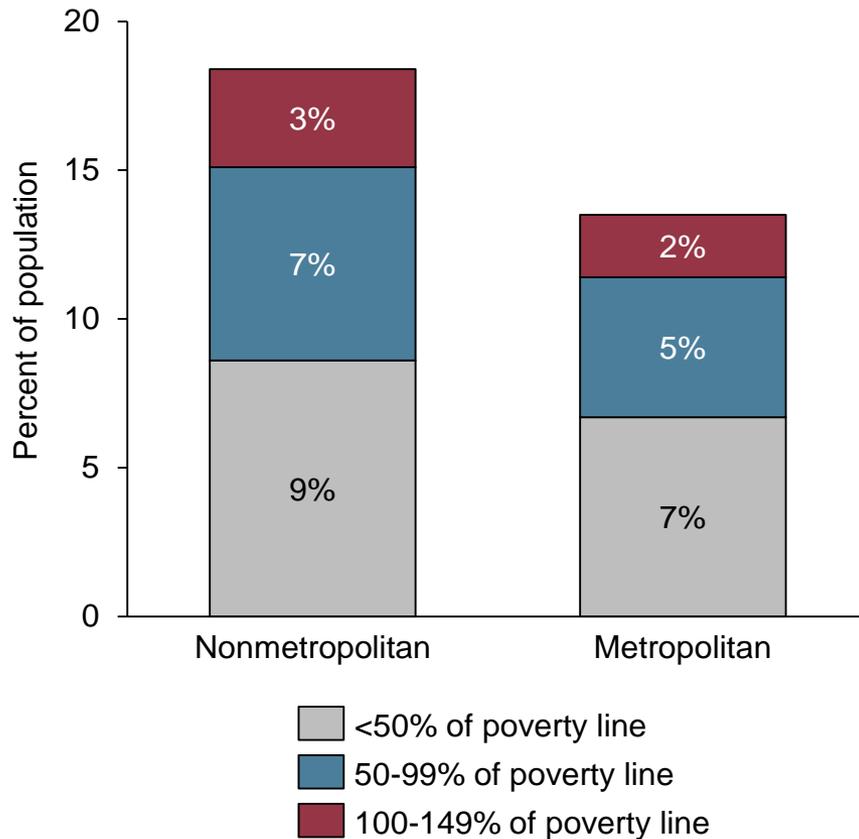
Note: Completely rural counties have a population that is 100% rural.

Sources: [American FactFinder](#) (2019); [Census](#) (2016)

Rural counties struggle with higher average rates of poverty, deep poverty, and intergenerational poverty

Poverty Rates

By metro/nonmetropolitan county and level of poverty, 2016

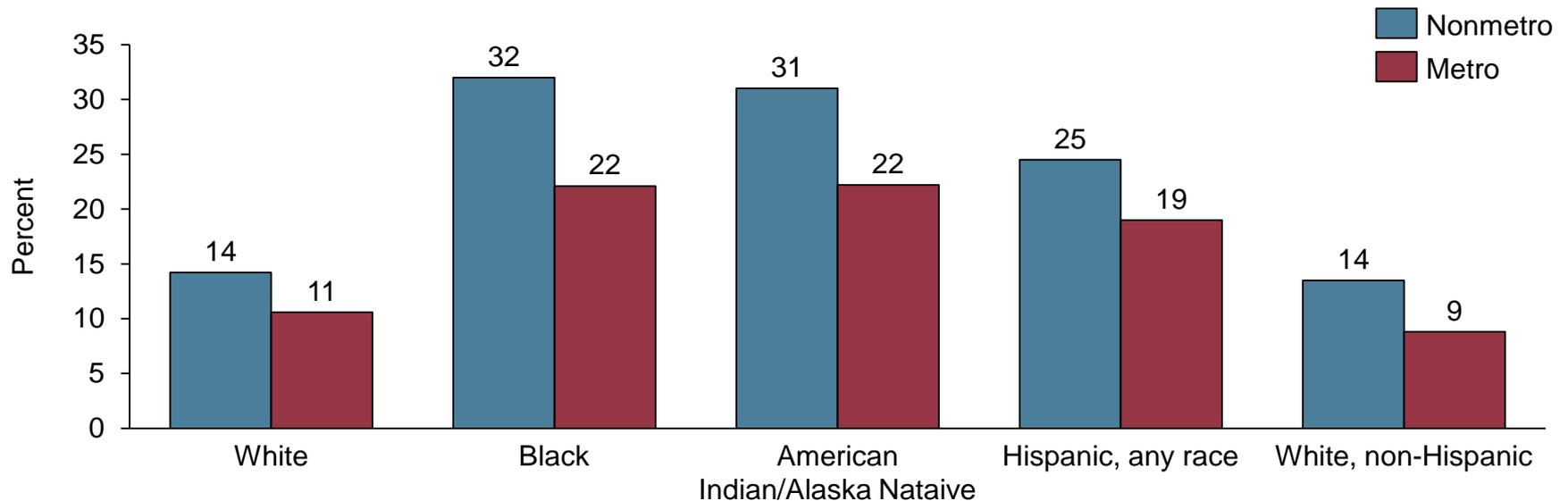


- On average, a higher rate of individuals living in nonmetropolitan counties live in **poverty** compared to those in metropolitan counties (19% vs. 14%).
- A higher rate of nonmetropolitan residents live in **deep poverty** (<50% of the federal poverty line) than those in metropolitan counties.
- **Intergenerational poverty** is also more common in the poorest rural areas, including among black families in the Deep South, white families in Appalachia and the Ozarks, Native Americans in states with large reservations, and Hispanics in communities along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Rural poverty rates are highest among nonwhite populations ...

Poverty Rates

By race and region, 2013-2017

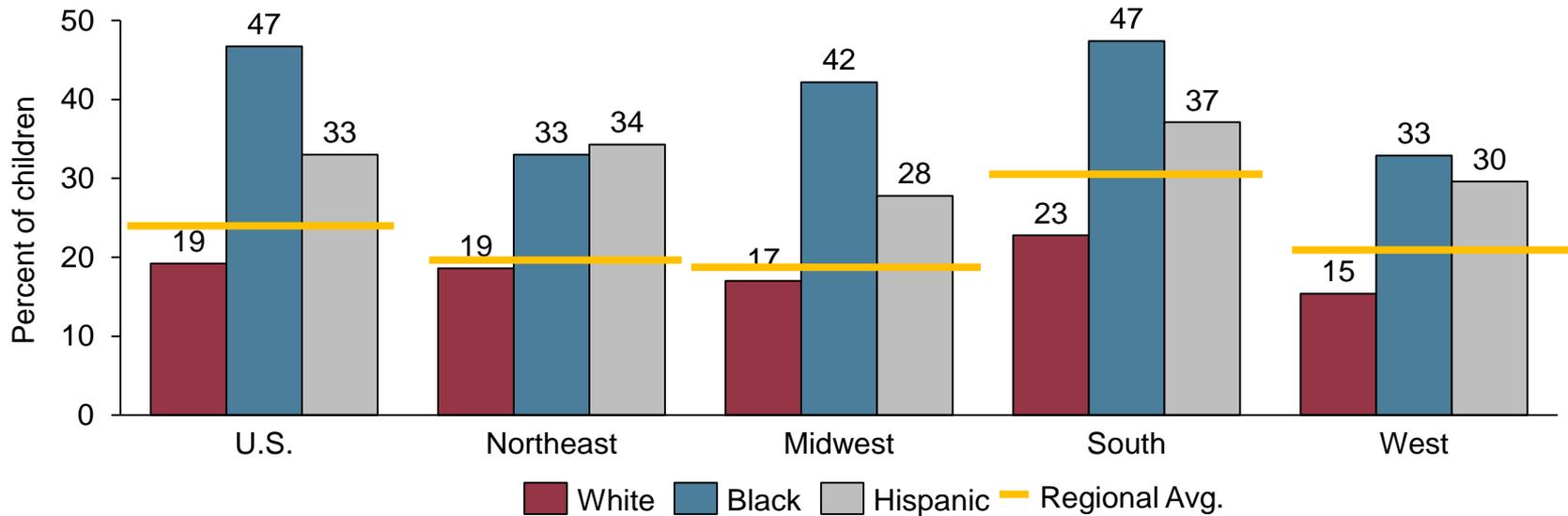


For members of all racial and ethnic groups, poverty rates are higher in nonmetropolitan areas compared to metropolitan areas. Rural poverty rates are highest among black and American Indian/Alaska native communities.

... and are particularly high for black and Hispanic children living in the South

Rural Child Poverty Rates

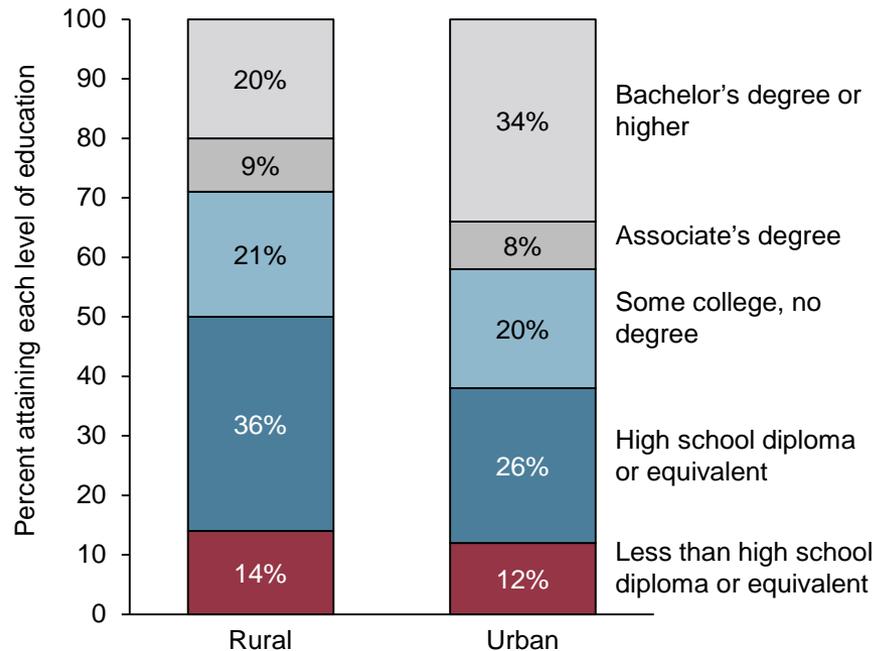
By race and region, 2015



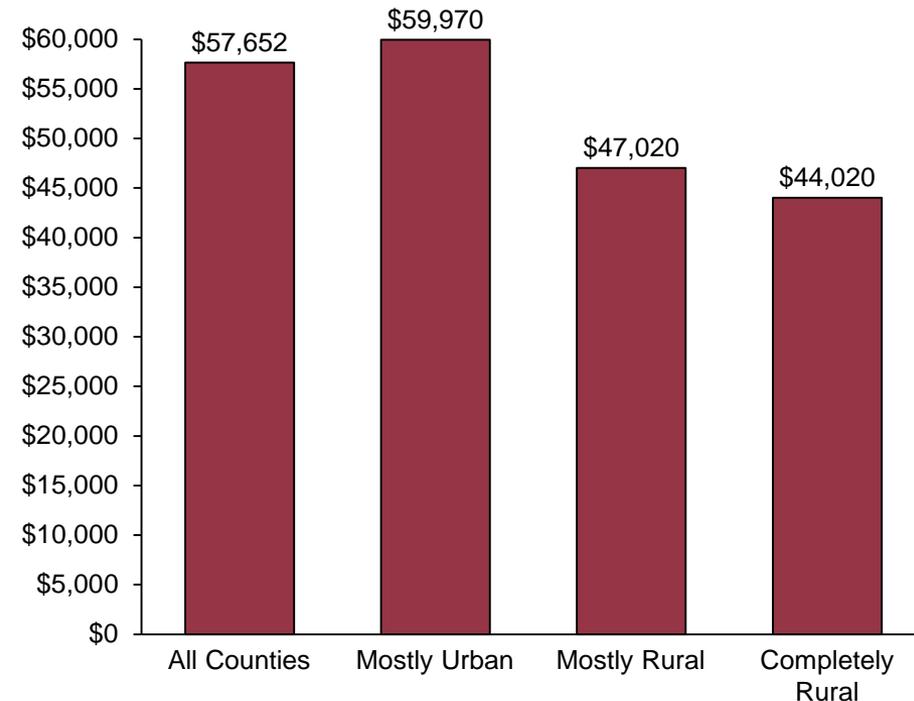
- At 30%, the average rural child poverty rate is highest in the South
- In all regions but the Northeast, black children have the highest rates of rural poverty
- In all regions, rural child poverty rates for white children are below the regional averages

Rural counties also tend to have lower educational attainment and lower median incomes than urban counties

Educational Attainment for Adults 25 and Older
By county type, 2017



Median Household Income
By county type, 2013-2017



Rural Americans are more likely to have only a high school diploma, and less likely to have a four-year degree or higher, than their urban counterparts. Similarly, households in rural counties tend to have lower median incomes.

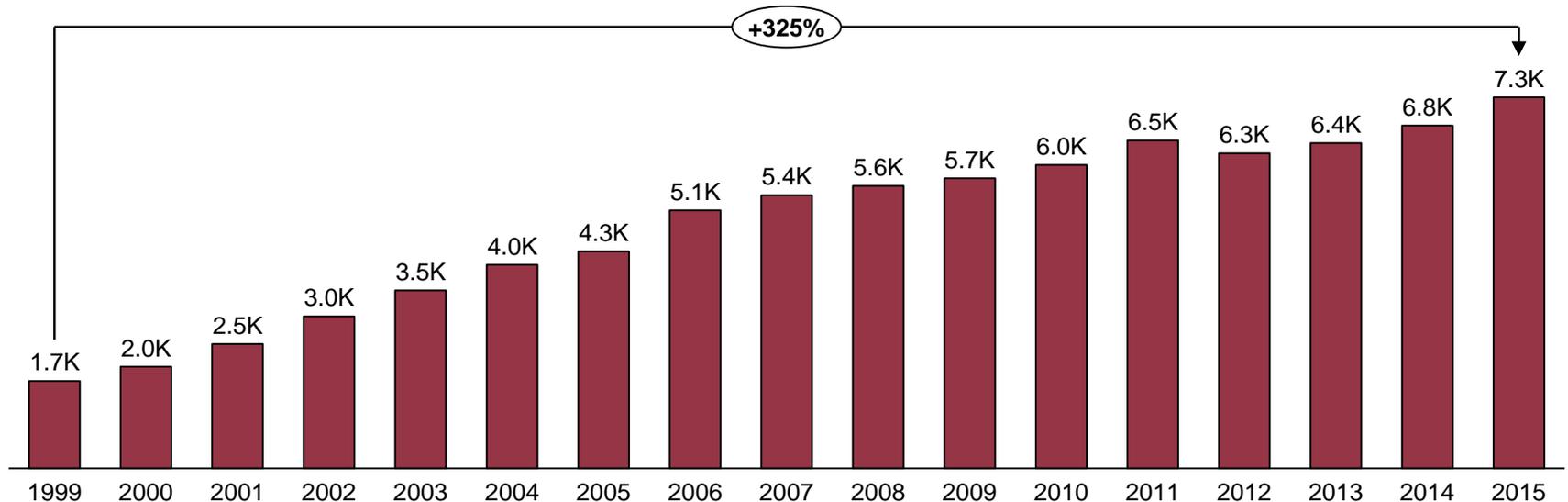
Note: Cost of living in rural communities tends to be lower than in other communities, which may somewhat deflate differences in "real" income.

Sources: [USDA ERS](#) (2019); [Census](#) (2019)

Drug overdose deaths in rural counties have outpaced those in urban counties, fueled largely by opioid addiction

Number of Deaths by Drug Overdose

For nonmetropolitan counties, 2000 to 2015

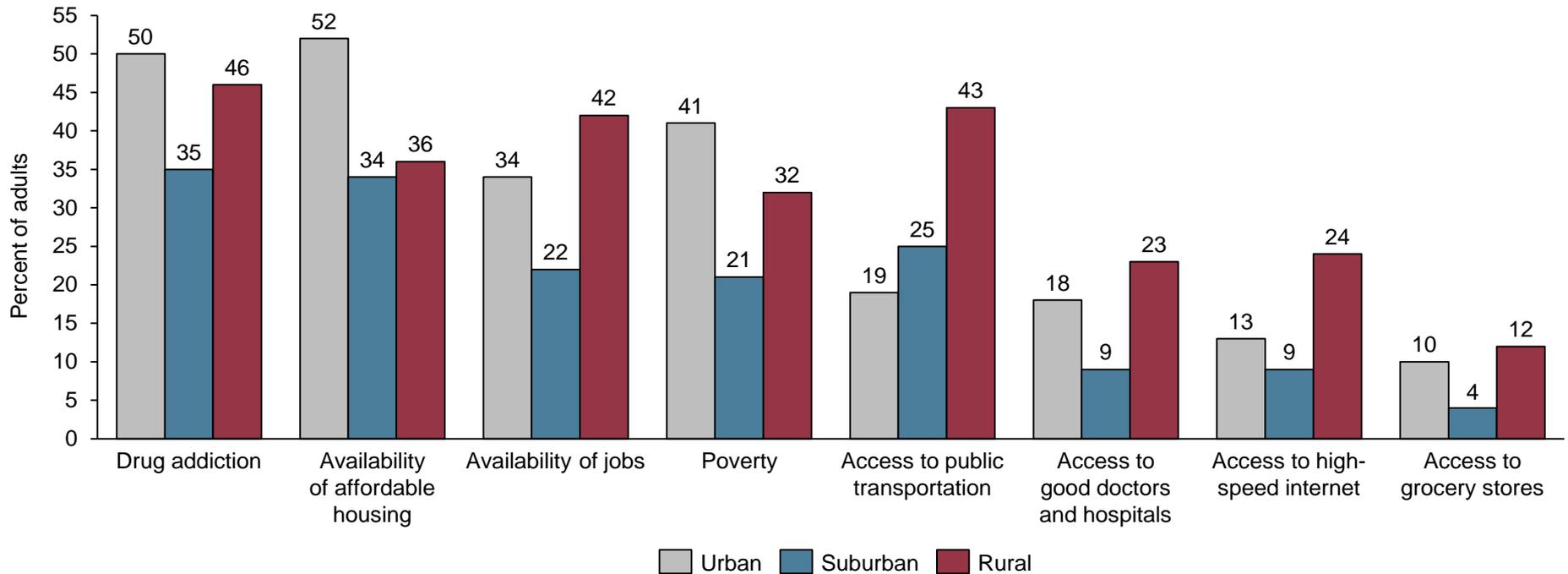


- Between 2000 and 2015, the number of drug overdose deaths rose by 325 percent in nonmetropolitan counties, compared to 198 percent in metropolitan counties.
- The drug overdose death rate in rural counties reached 18.7 deaths per 100,000 persons in 2016, nearly five times higher than it was in 2000.
- Poor rural counties and those with low economic prospects are among the hardest hit; they have higher rates of opioid prescriptions, hospitalizations, and overdose deaths.

And adults living in rural communities report persistent social challenges and lack of access to amenities

Problems Facing Communities

Percent of adults saying each is a major problem in their community, by community type, 2018



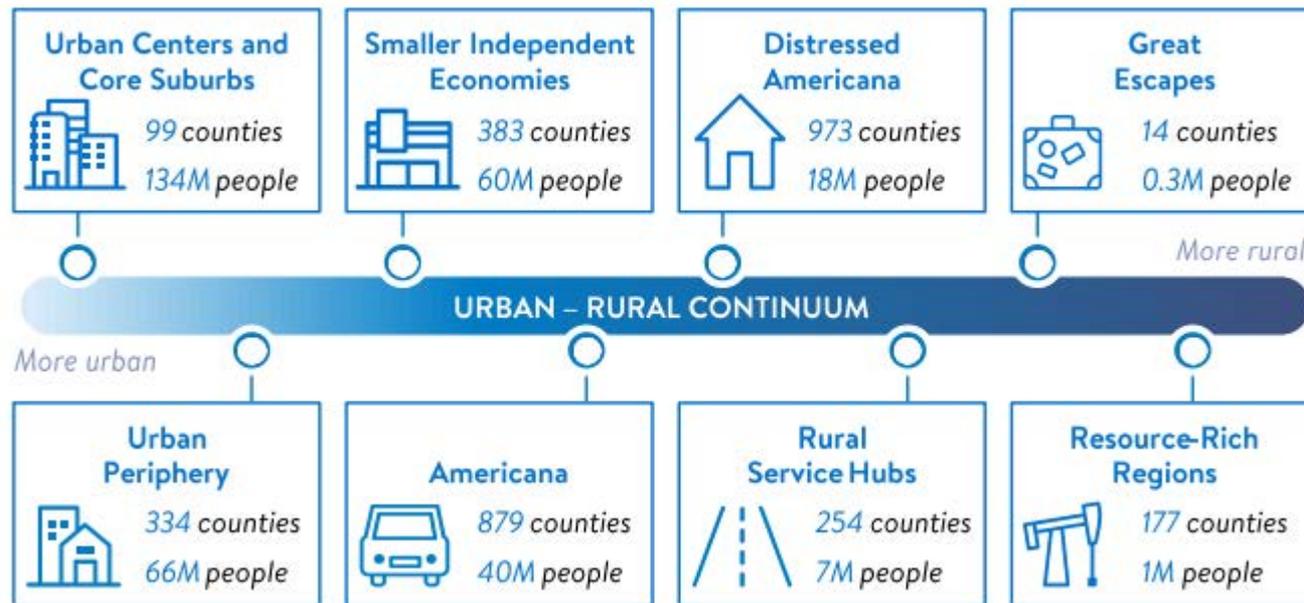
Compared to adults living in suburban and urban communities, a higher percentage of adults living in rural communities report that the availability of jobs and access to public transportation, good doctors and hospitals, high-speed internet, and grocery stores are challenges in their communities.

Importantly, national and regional data mask differences between rural community types across the country

Recent research by Walmart and McKinsey & Company categorized communities along a continuum of urbanity using five broad categories of data:

1. Innovation (e.g., universities and patents)
2. Development indicators (e.g., urban-rural continuum and real estate data)
3. Socioeconomic factors (e.g., poverty status and workforce participation)
4. Economic base (e.g., GDP by industry and productivity)
5. Human capital (e.g., population, demographics, and educational attainment)

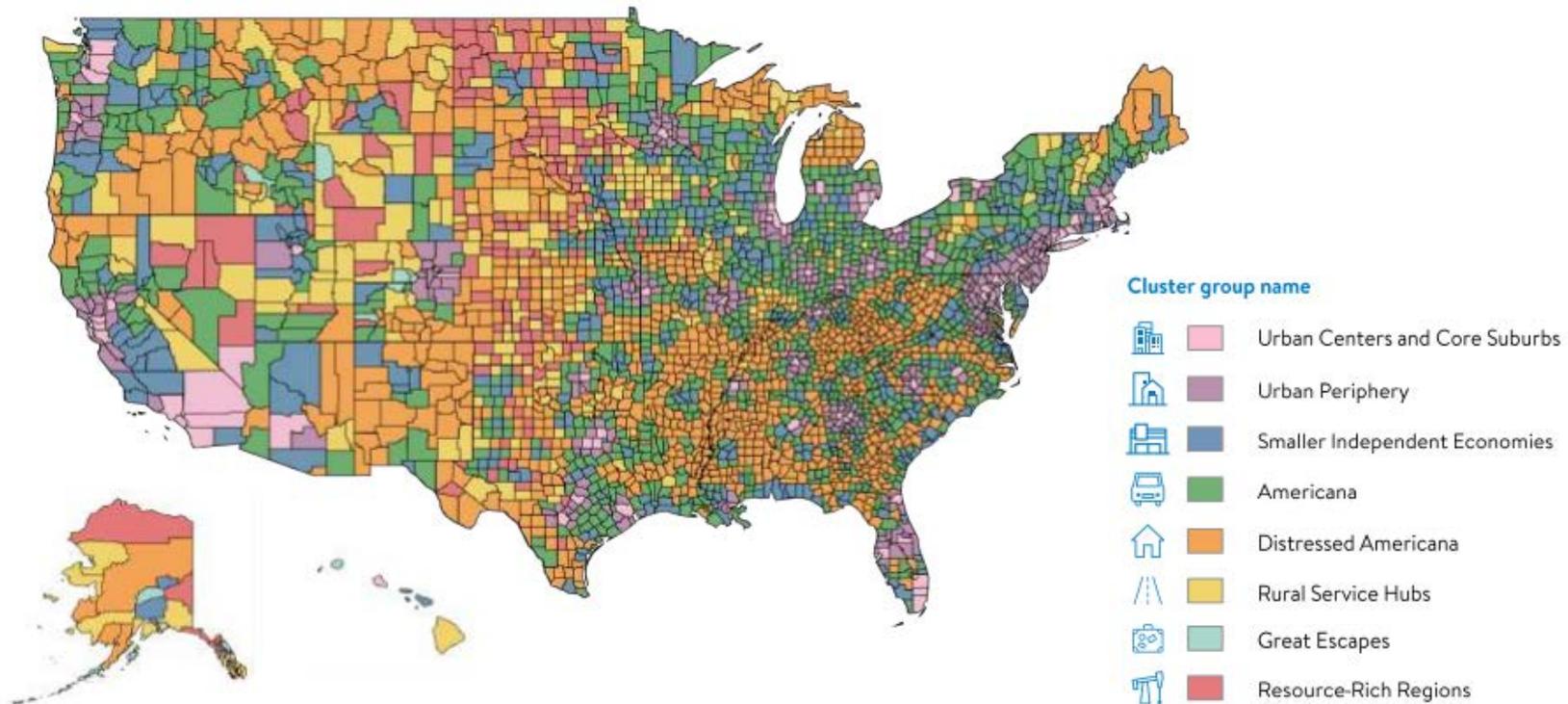
Their analysis identified eight community archetypes:



Rural community archetypes span the country, and each has different assets and challenges

Map of Community Archetypes

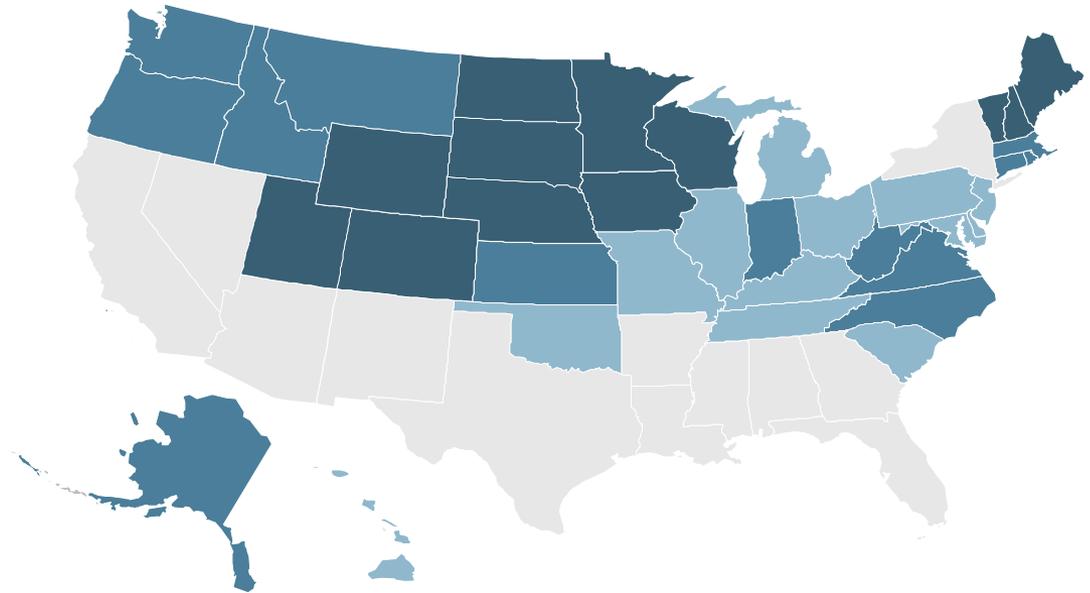
By cluster group, 2019



Communities identified as “Distressed Americana” are present in nearly every region of the country.

Measures of social capital also demonstrate variability, with strong social capital also concentrated in the upper Midwest

- The Joint Economic Committee's Social Capital Project has created a state-level social capital index that includes indicators related to family unity and interaction, social support, community and institutional health, crime, and charitable donations.
- Economic mobility tends to be higher when states score better on this social capital index.
- Social capital is positively correlated with states that are less dense and more rural.



Social Capital Index Score:

0.8 and above

0 to 0.79

-0.79 to -0.1

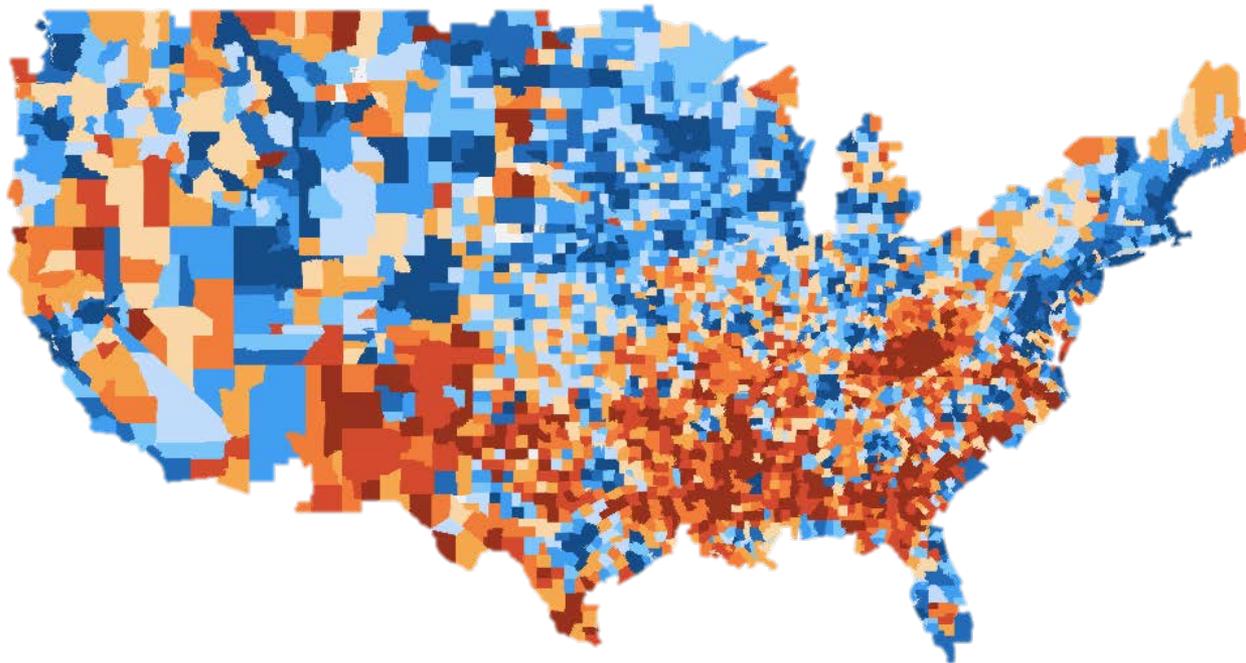
-0.8 and below

- The 12 states with the highest social capital scores are distributed across two continuous, mostly rural blocs – nine states in the Midwest and three states in the far Northeast.
- Notably, much of the South and Southwest perform relatively poorly on the social capital index.
- Research has shown that historical events, like slavery and Jim Crow laws in the South, and the forced movement and violence experienced by American Indian populations, have an ongoing impact on these regions and the challenges they face.

While the Upper Midwest is often a bright spot among rural communities, the rural South stands out for its distress

Economic Distress Scores

By county, 2017



Distress scores are measures of a county's economic well-being relative to its peers

Trends in economic and social distress in the rural South align to findings about the state of rural education across the country.

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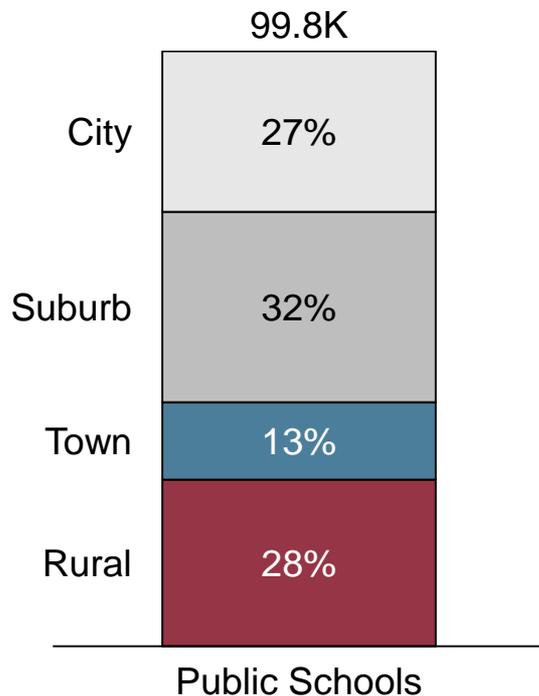
Education in Rural America

Looking Ahead

Twenty-eight percent of the nation's public schools are rural; these schools enroll 19% of all public pk-12 students

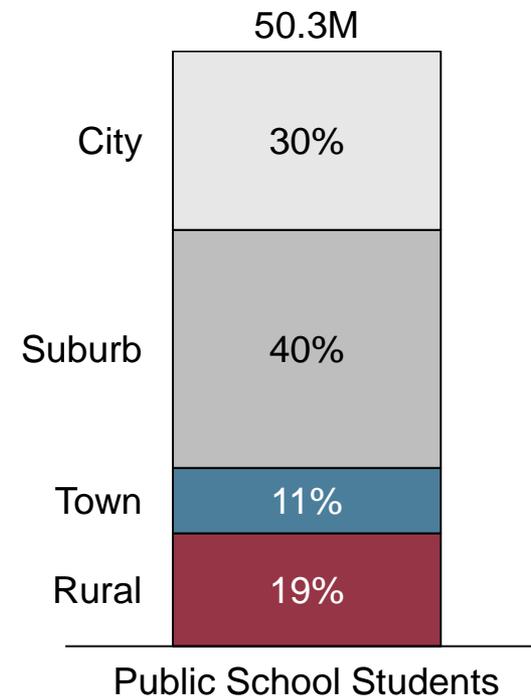
Percent of Public Schools Nationwide

By region, 2017



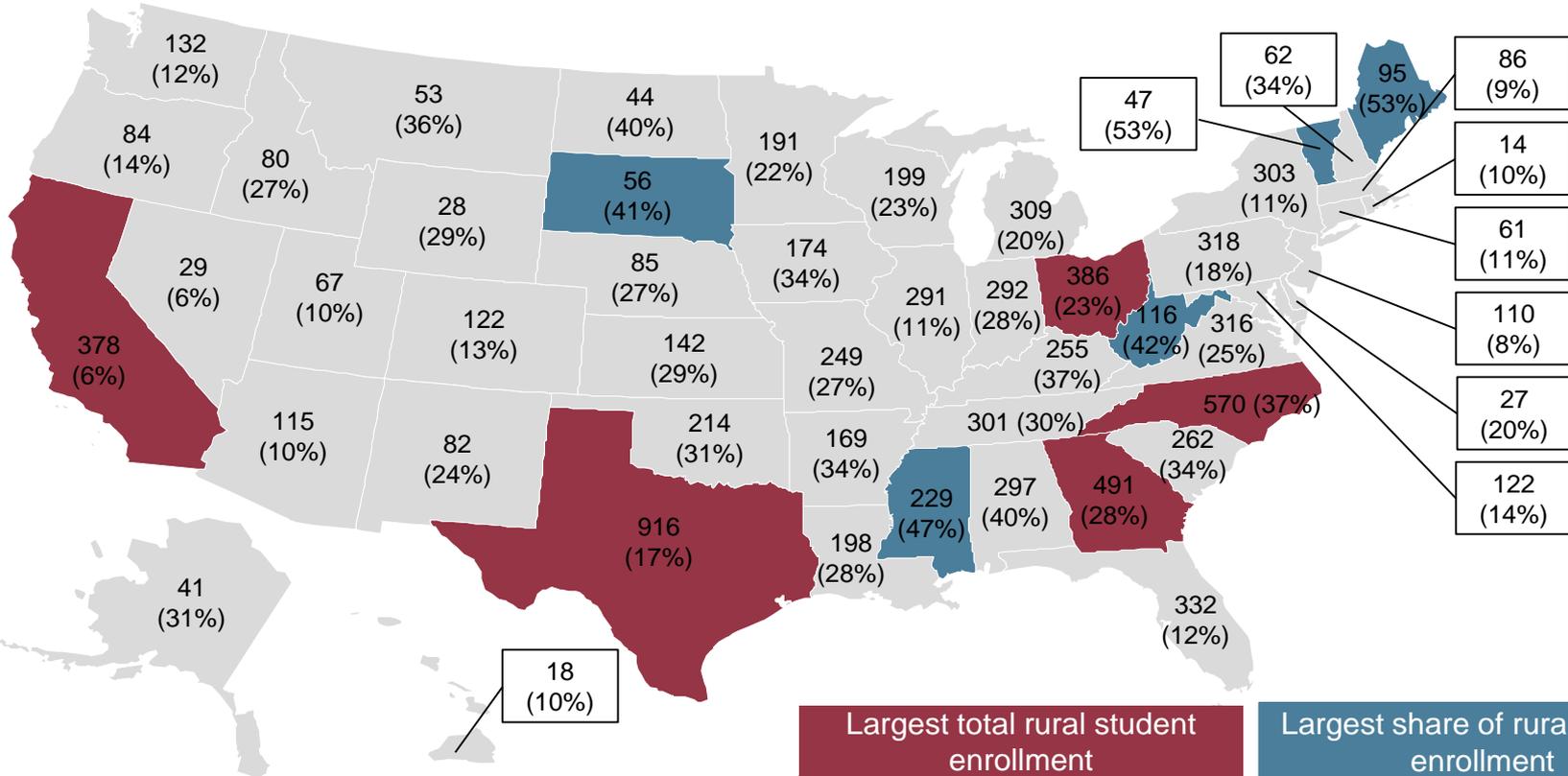
Percent of Students Nationwide

By region, 2017



The number of rural students and rate of enrollment in rural schools vary substantially by state

Total Rural Pk-12 Student Enrollment (in thousands) and Rural Student Enrollment Share
By state, 2017



Largest total rural student enrollment

1. Texas (916K)
2. North Carolina (570K)
3. Georgia (491K)
4. Ohio (386K)
5. California (378K)

Largest share of rural student enrollment

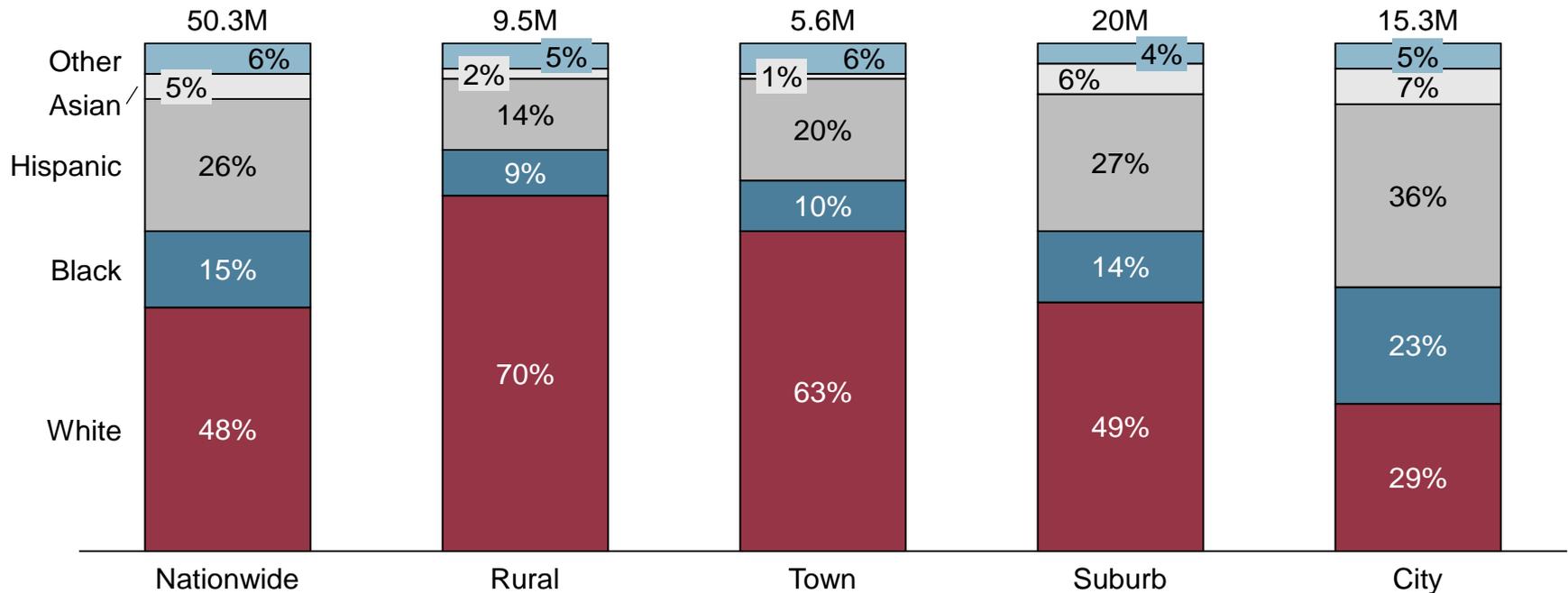
1. Vermont (53%)
2. Maine (53%)
3. Mississippi (47%)
4. West Virginia (42%)
5. South Dakota (41%)

Source: ELSI

White students make up a higher proportion of the overall rural student population compared to other geographies

Nationwide Pk-12 Student Enrollment

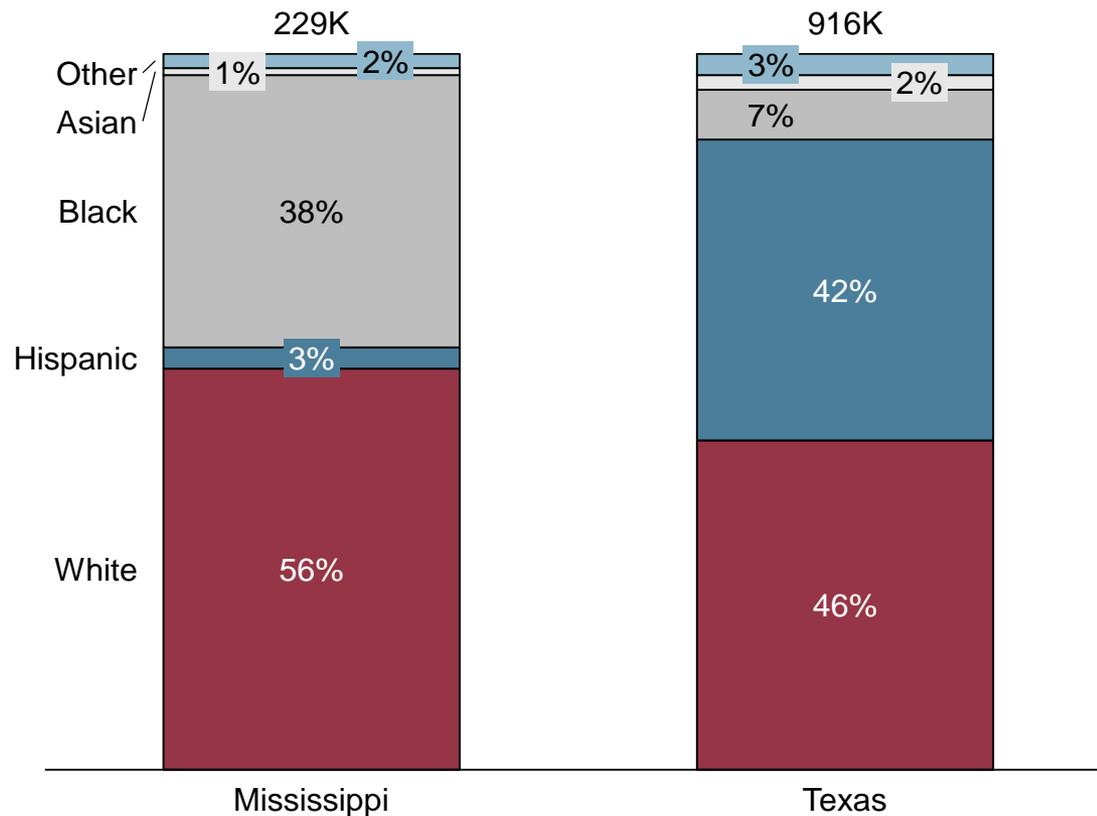
By region and race/ethnicity, 2017



However, in some states, minority groups make up substantial portions of rural student enrollment

Pk-12 Enrollment in Rural Schools

For Mississippi and Texas, by race/ethnicity, 2017

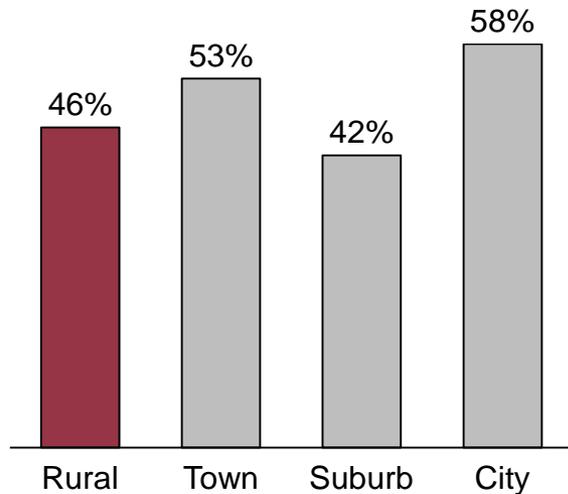


In Mississippi, black students make up more than one-third of the rural student enrollment, compared to 9% nationwide. In Texas, more than 40% of rural students are Hispanic, compared to 14% nationwide.

Nationally, 46% of rural students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), although rates are higher in many states

Percentage of Pk-12 Public School Students Eligible for FRL

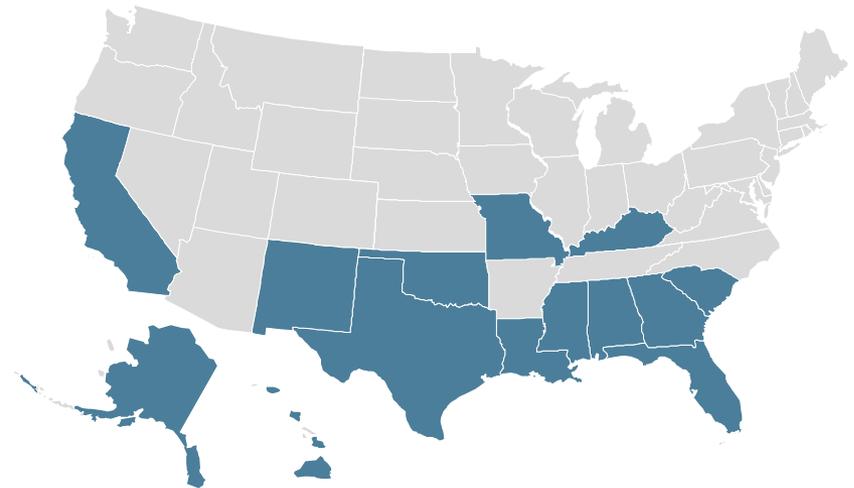
By region, 2017



The percentage of students eligible for FRL is lower for rural schools overall than schools located in towns or in cities.

Rural Student Poverty

States with rural student FRL-eligibility rates at or above 50%, 2017

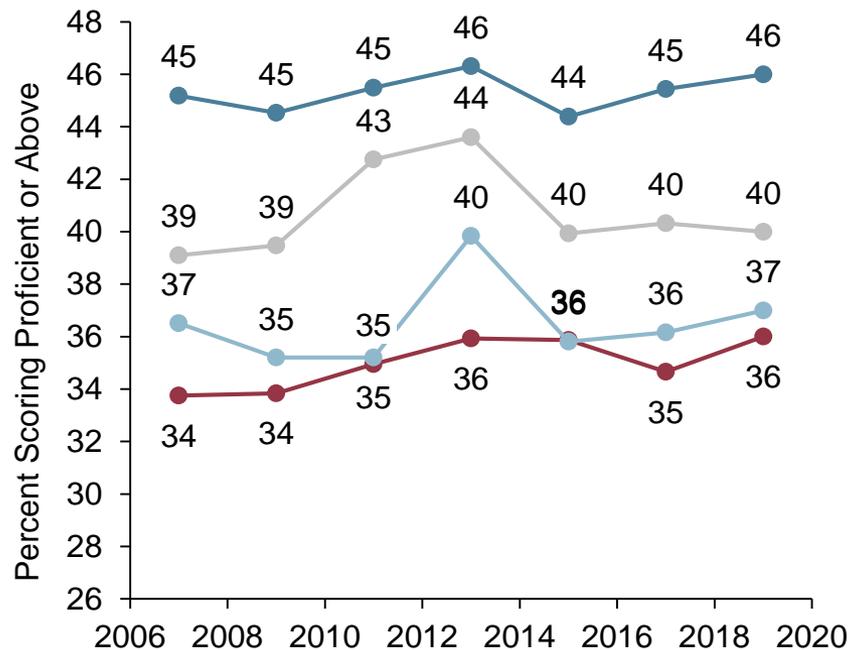


Rural poverty is largely concentrated in the South and Southeastern United States.

At the K-12 level, rural students lag behind suburban students but outperform students in other locations

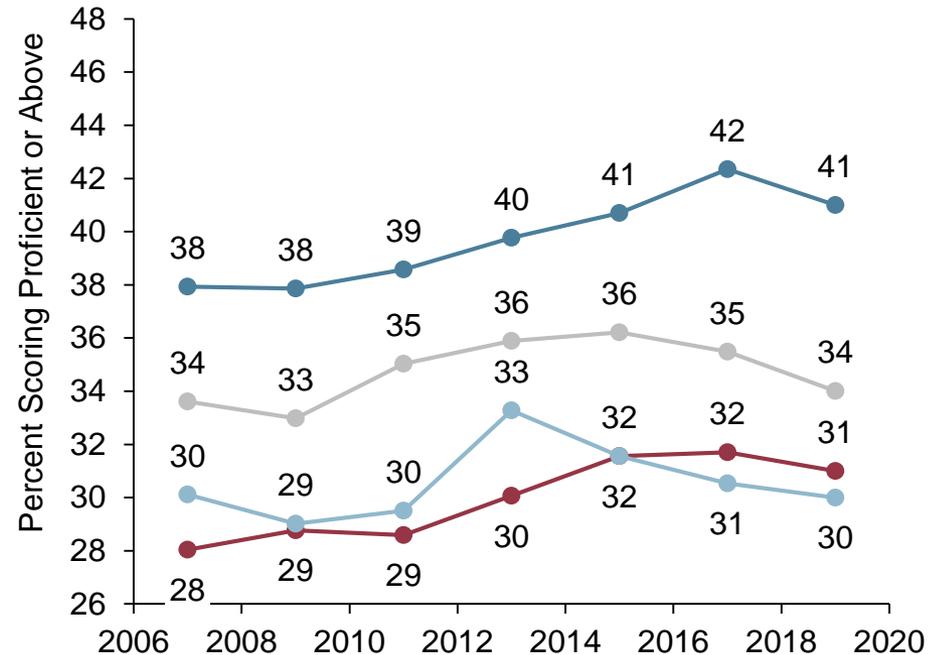
Performance on Grade 4 Math NAEP

By school location, 2007-2019



Performance on Grade 4 Reading NAEP

By school location, 2007-2019



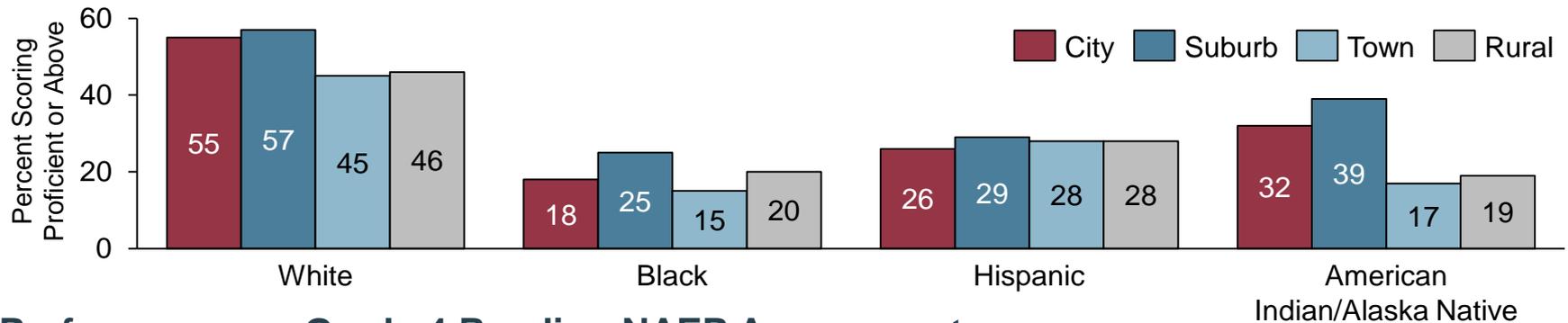
— City — Suburb — Town — Rural

Regionally — across the Northeast, Midwest, West, and South — rural students consistently have proficiency rates lower than suburban students but higher than students in towns and cities.

Achievement gaps in math and reading persist among rural students along racial/ethnic lines ...

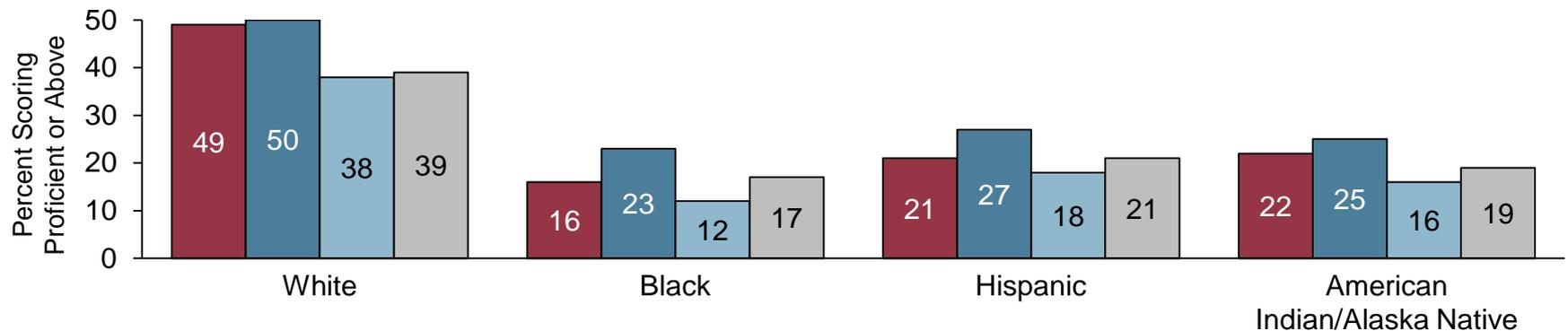
Performance on Grade 4 Mathematics NAEP Assessment

By student subgroup and school location, 2019



Performance on Grade 4 Reading NAEP Assessment

By student subgroup and school location, 2019

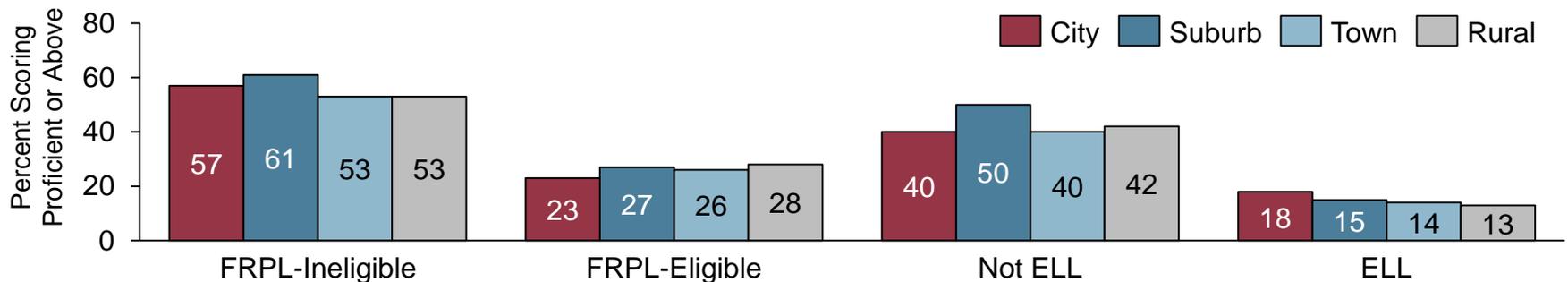


Across school locations, black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students have lower rates of proficiency on the 4th grade NAEP than their white peers. In addition, rural white and American Indian/Alaska Native students both perform lower than their city and suburban peers.

... as well as among other historically underserved subgroups

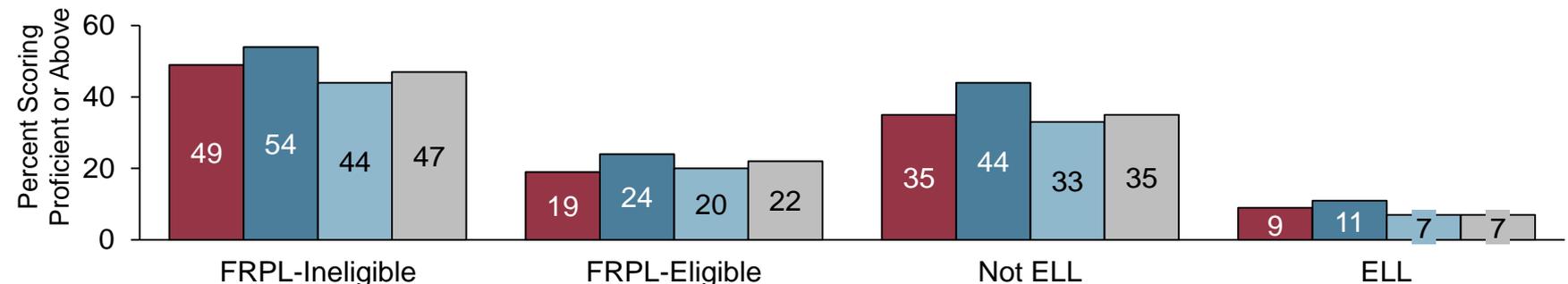
Performance on Grade 4 Mathematics NAEP Assessment

By student subgroup and school location, 2019



Performance on Grade 4 Reading NAEP Assessment

By student subgroup and school location, 2019

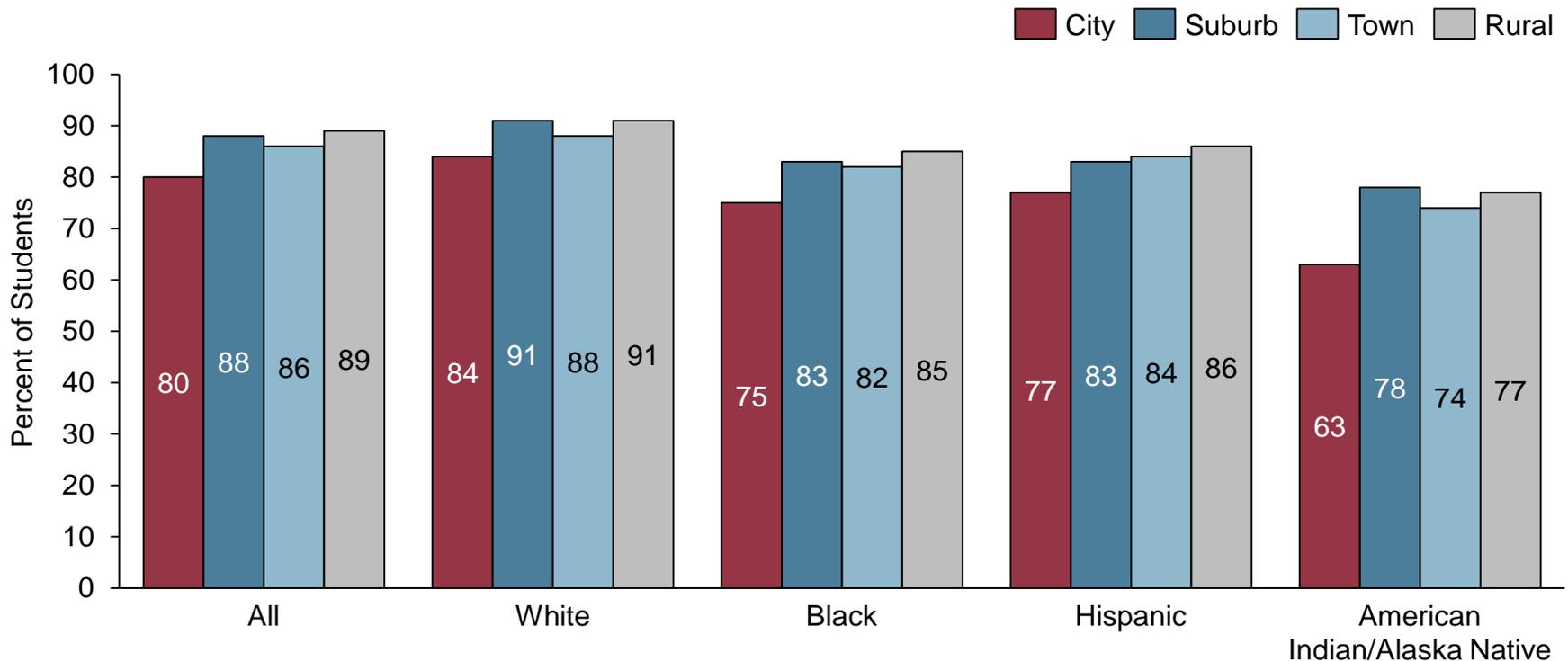


Rural students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch outperform similar students in other locations in math, and outperform their peers in cities and towns in reading. Rural students who are English language learners lag behind their peers in other locations.

Rural students graduate from high school at higher rates than students in other locations

Public High School Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

By student subgroup and school location, 2016-17

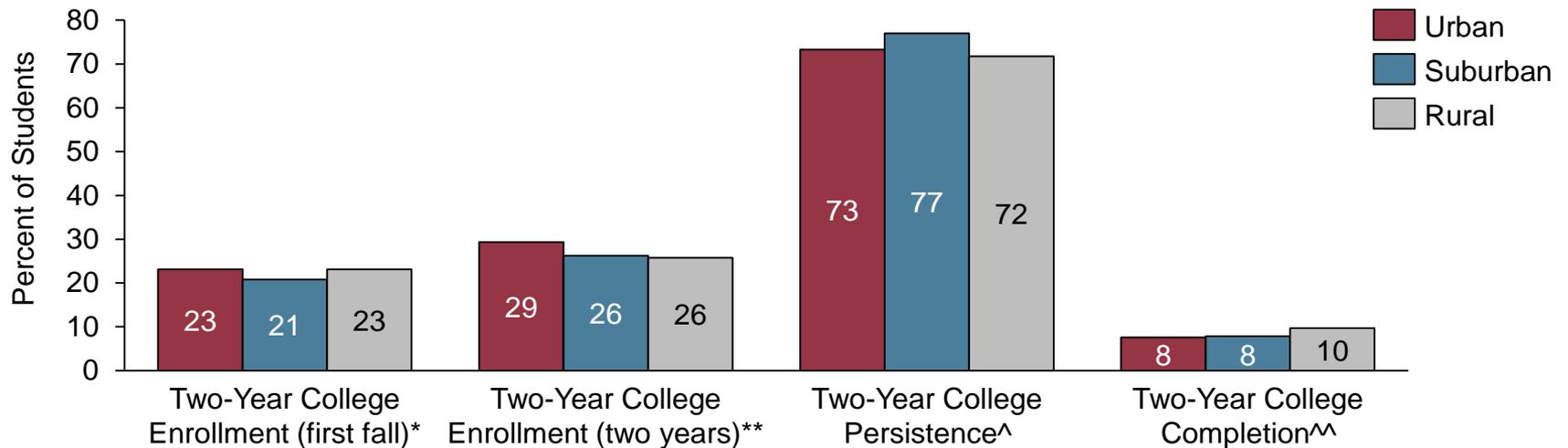


Across most subgroups, rural students graduate from high school at rates that are similar or higher than their peers in other locations.

At the postsecondary level, rural students matriculate to and complete two-year degrees at similar rates as their peers ...

Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion Rates at Two-Year Colleges

By school location, various years



- Rural students enroll in two-year colleges at similar rates as their urban and suburban peers.
- Rural students are somewhat less likely to persist from their first year to their second year in two-year colleges than students from other locations.
- While rural students are somewhat more likely to complete programs at two-year colleges within six years of enrolling, only 10% do so.

*First fall after high school graduation, class of 2017

**First two years after high school graduation, class of 2015

^Persistence from first to second year of college, class of 2015

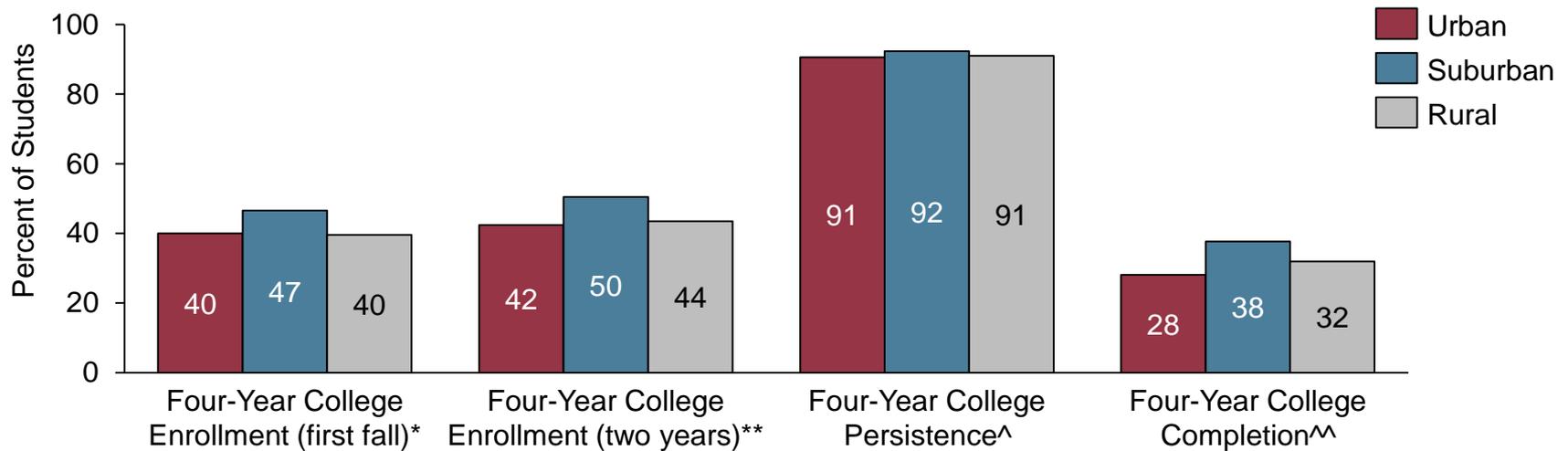
^^Six-year completion rates, class of 2011

Source: [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#) (2018)

... but they matriculate to and complete four-year degrees at lower rates than their suburban peers

Enrollment, Persistence, and Completion Rates at Four-Year Colleges

By school location, various years



- Rural students enroll in four-year colleges at higher rates than urban students but at lower rates than suburban students.
- Rural students persist from their first year to their second year in four-year colleges at similar rates as their urban and suburban peers.
- Rural students are more likely than urban students to complete programs at four-year colleges within six years of enrolling but are less likely to do so than suburban students.

*First fall after high school graduation, class of 2017

**First two years after high school graduation, class of 2015

^Persistence from first to second year of college, class of 2015

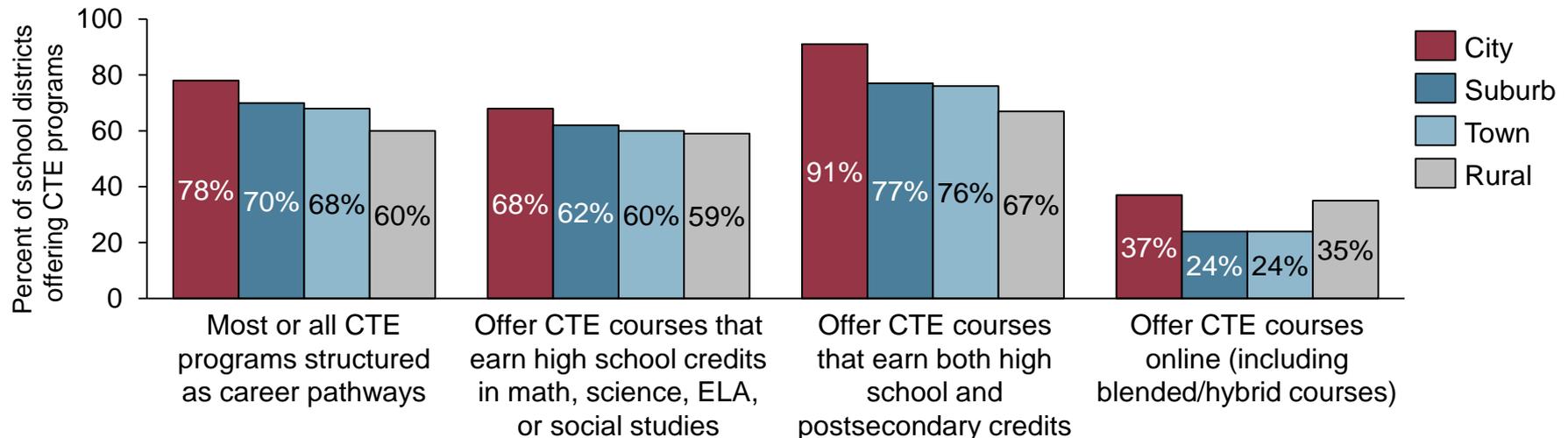
^^Six-year completion rates, class of 2011

Source: [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#) (2018)

Moreover, rural CTE programs may not be effectively designed, resourced, or implemented to maximize impact

Characteristics of CTE Programs Offered by School Districts

By district type, 2016-17

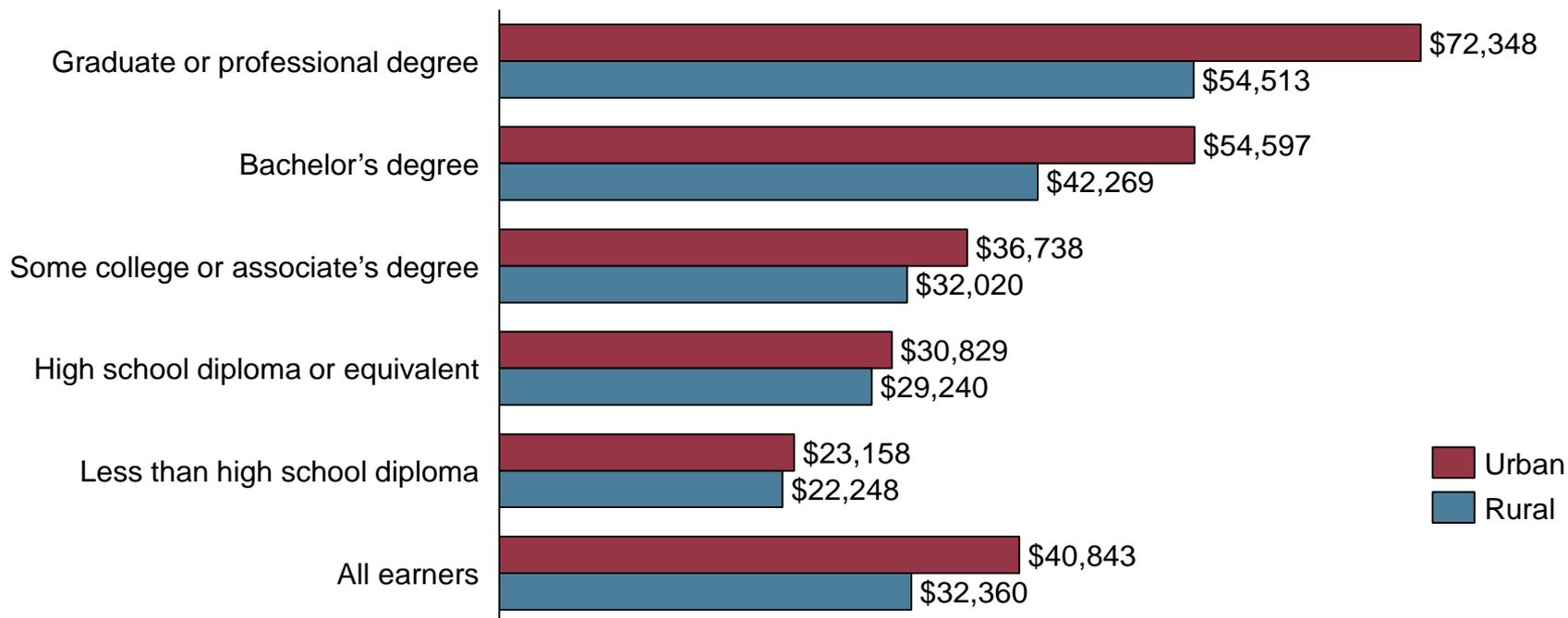


- Ninety-eight percent of rural districts offer CTE programs to high school students but are less likely to provide programs that are career pathways, earn credit in key subject areas, or earn dual credit.
- Rural districts are less likely to offer CTE programs that include student-run enterprises, mentoring by local employers, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships than other district types.
- Rural districts are also less likely to get advice or guidance from employers on CTE programming and curriculum.
- Rural districts are more likely to identify lack of funding, high program costs, and facilities limitations as “large” or “very large” barriers to providing CTE programs but less likely to cite finding or keeping teachers for in-demand industries as a challenge.

Differences in educational attainment and earnings have economic implications for rural communities

Median Earnings

By educational attainment and location, 2017



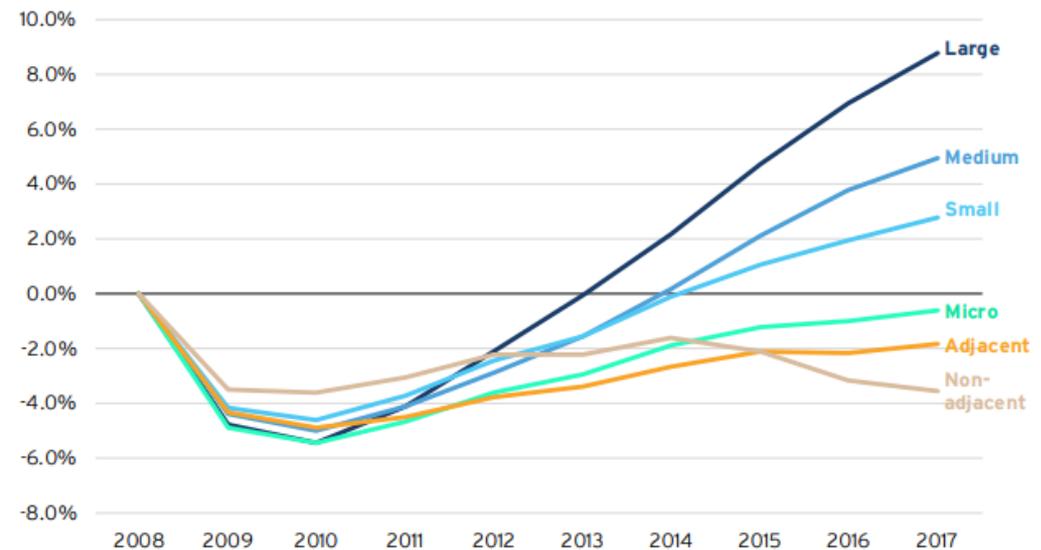
Rural populations have lower earnings than their urban counterparts across all levels of education — especially for bachelor's and advanced degrees, though some of these disparities may be accounted for by differences in cost of living.

Especially as farming and manufacturing jobs decline, and new jobs require greater skills

- The rise of globalization and the information economy has boosted returns to urban areas and devalued the resources and manual labor supplied by nonmetropolitan areas.
- While the wage gap between regions was shrinking as recently as 1980, the last decade of growth has mostly been concentrated in a small number of urban hubs.
- Jobs at “high risk”* of automation are more concentrated in rural communities; for example, about 25% of the jobs in Americana, Distressed Americana, Resource-Rich Regions, and Rural Service Hubs are considered high risk.

FIGURE 3

Employment by community size type Percent change since 2008, 2008-17



Source: Brookings analysis of QCEW data

There has been a decline in core industries that undergird rural economies, like timber, coal mining, tobacco, and textiles in Appalachia, or agriculture and low-skilled manufacturing in the Delta region. And continued automation could place additional stress on rural economies in the future.

*“High-risk” jobs are defined as those susceptible to more than 70% automation.

Note: “Large” communities are those with over 1M residents; “medium” between 250K and 1M; “small” between 50K and 250K; “micro” between 10K and 50K; “adjacent” are rural areas adjacent to a metro area; and “non-adjacent” are rural areas not adjacent to a metro area.

Sources: [Brookings](#) (2018); [MarketWatch](#) (2019); [Walmart & McKinsey](#) (2019)

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The State of Rural America

The State of Education in Rural America

Looking Ahead

Rural schools face challenges similar to urban schools, although they often manifest differently given geography



Enrollment

Declining enrollment in rural schools can lead to challenges including school closure and/or consolidation, tighter budgets, and fewer school amenities and extracurricular activities.



Poverty

Rural schools struggle with high rates of poverty. Although FRL eligibility is lower on average, rural counties tend to have higher rates of children living in poverty compared to urban counties.



Human Capital

Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, school leaders, and system leaders is a challenge many schools face, made more difficult in rural districts due to their isolation and lack of social, cultural, and economic amenities.



Transportation

Busing is costly for schools, especially in rural districts where students live far apart and frequently have long bus rides. School consolidations can make these rides even longer.

Rural schools also face challenges unique to their geography



Policy Barriers

Policies written with urban schools in mind often create additional barriers for rural schools. For example, school improvement policies that require replacing low-performing staff can exasperate rural schools' human capital challenges.



Funding

States' school funding policies often disadvantage rural schools due to their size, and rural schools often lack a strong tax base, making it difficult to pass levies and bonds to fund district needs.



Course Access

Due to their size and human capital challenges, rural schools often struggle to offer students robust course options. This is particularly true for specialized coursework (e.g., high-level math or science, or foreign languages).



Community Assets

Rural communities often lack the social and cultural assets common in larger communities (like YMCAs, preschools, nonprofits, etc.). Schools either must attempt to compensate, or students may go without access to these opportunities.

Common strategies for improving K-12 education have some benefits for rural schools but also create challenges

Strategy	Benefits	Challenges
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology can increase access to effective teachers and other educational resources. • It can also provide opportunities for personalized learning. • Ninety-eight percent of school districts have internet speeds meeting the FCC's 100 kbps per student goal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 59% of nonmetropolitan children have internet access at home. • Many rural students live far away from school, limiting their ability to rely on their schools for internet access.
School Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter schools can reduce compliance burdens and provide more specialized education options. • Greater access to courses beyond district offerings could allow rural students to have more options without disrupting local schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charter schools in rural communities may pull students and funding away from one school or a small number of schools already facing constrained budgets, and therefore often face community backlash. • Course access often depends on students' access to broadband, which is often constrained.
Teacher Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher evaluation reforms can help reward and retain effective teachers and remove minimally effective teachers from the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural schools already struggle to attract a sufficient number of teachers, meaning supply-side approaches, like recruiting efforts and certifying paraprofessionals, may be more promising in these areas.

Sources: [EdTech Magazine](#) (2018); [ROCI](#) (2015); [Education Superhighway](#) (2018); [NCES](#) (2018); Education Next ([2015](#) and [2019](#)); [Fordham Institute](#) (2017)

Nonetheless, many rural districts have been able to succeed despite their challenges and resource constraints

Research has shown that a higher portion of remote rural districts fall into the category of being “productivity superstars,” exhibiting higher outcomes than would be predicted by their mix of students and access to funds. These districts share common themes:

Developing relationships with students, staff, and the community

- Leaders in these districts prioritized relationships and put real effort into building and sustaining them.
- For example, Holyoke School District in Colorado sought the input of its teachers, parents, and local businesses on raising the district’s student achievement goals, which increased community support and teacher buy-in.

Utilizing flexibility, creativity, and self-reliance

- These districts rely on local ingenuity and resourcefulness rather than looking to others to solve their problems.
- For example, in Lincoln, Wyoming, teachers created their own professional development program, which other districts around the country have now adopted.

Making conscious trade-offs

- District leaders talked about problem-solving and the conscious financial trade-offs they made to better support students.
- Typically, these districts focus their funding on improving instruction, attracting high-quality teachers, and rewarding good performance.

Respecting costs and stewarding public funds

- Leaders in these districts are frugal, determined to get the most out of every dollar, and don’t assume that every change in the schools will require new money.
- For example, when Brackettville, Texas, failed to raise additional funds for replacing a building, the district opted to renovate the school with existing funds, and used modular buildings to add a 10-classroom facility.

And rural communities have many strengths that can help support efforts to strengthen the local school system

Individual Assets

- Research has shown that rural communities' "greatest assets are their people."
- These assets include civic and community engagement through volunteerism, entrepreneurship, and the resilience and adaptive capacities of rural residents.

Organizational and Associational Assets

- Schools serve as anchor institutions in many rural areas, and educational institutions across all academic levels have been identified as strong community assets.
- Faith-based organizations are an important asset in rural communities, providing social support and a place to gather and discuss topics that impact the community more broadly.
- Small businesses and chambers of commerce also help rural areas create jobs and wealth, and they often invest in the local community.

Community Assets

- Many rural community assets are tied to natural resources, including water, land, resources used for energy, and timber.

Cultural Assets and Historical Context

- Many people in rural areas feel a deep connection to where they grew up and have a strong sense of history and place.
- They also have important cultural assets, including a close-knit sense of community, strong family support systems and neighborly social ties, and pride in self and family.

Dozens of organizations have been working in rural communities for decades

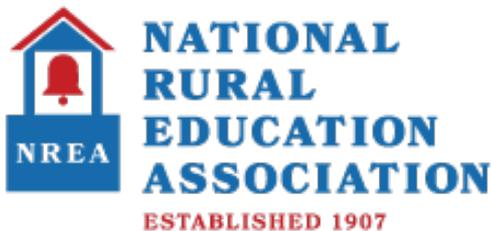


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In particular, economic development initiatives are working to bridge the gap between K-12 schools and postsecondary options



- Established by an act of Congress in 1965, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government.
- ARC makes investments across Appalachia to pursue various goals, like boosting economic opportunities, readying the workforce, supporting critical infrastructure like broadband and transportation, and building the capacity of leaders and communities.
- ARC's education and training activities focus on a range of issues, including workforce skills, early childhood education, dropout prevention, and improved college attendance.

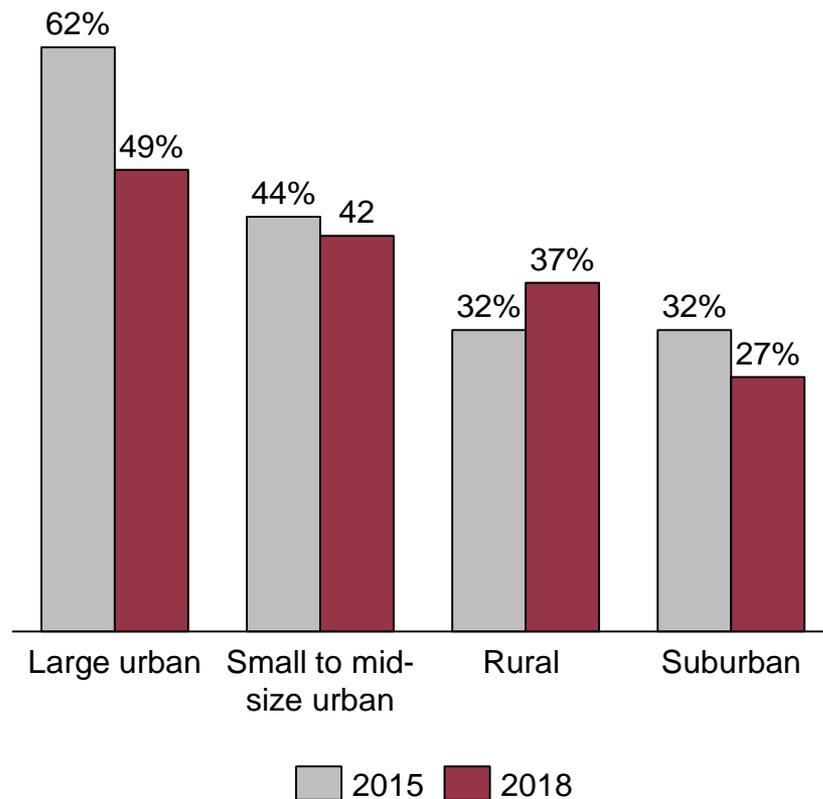


- The Golden LEAF Foundation is a nonprofit organization that receives a portion of North Carolina's funding from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with cigarette manufacturers.
- Golden LEAF has worked to increase economic opportunity in North Carolina's rural and tobacco-dependent communities under multiple focus areas.
- In education, the foundation focuses on graduating students from high school and college and has funded projects like scholarships, teacher training, and STEM and educational technology programs.
- The foundation also funds projects that develop skills needed by businesses looking to locate or expand in rural communities.

Rural areas have received relatively little philanthropic investment in the past, but the tides may be turning

Education Grantmakers Reporting Explicit Regional Focus

By community type, 2015 and 2018



- ✓ Although 19% of the population lives in rural communities, in 2009 just **7% of foundation grants went to rural communities**.
- ✓ Between 2010 and 2014, **per-capita giving in large urban areas like New York City reached nearly \$2,000; it was just \$41 per capita in some of the nation's most impoverished rural communities, like Alabama's Black Belt and the Mississippi Delta.**
- ✓ Between 2001 and 2015, **just 20% of philanthropic giving was directed to the South**, which is home to large numbers of African American and rural communities.
- ✓ Surveys of grant-makers in 2015 and 2018 found a **decrease in grant-making activities with an explicit focus on urban communities and an increase in those with a focus on rural communities.**

Conclusion

While rural communities are not a monolith — they vary widely in their locations, economies, and strengths and barriers — they tend to face some persistent challenges, including higher rates of poverty, lower median household incomes, and lower rates of educational attainment compared to urban areas.

The schools serving these rural communities often struggle with declining enrollment, high rates of child poverty, low economies of scale, and a lack of human capital and adequate transportation. Even so, while rural schools tend to lag behind suburban schools, they outperform those located in cities and towns on the whole. But like other places, achievement gaps persist across race and income levels.

The challenges facing rural communities and schools require different solutions and approaches than those commonly used in more urban environments. And we're not starting from scratch — there are bright spots in rural education that should give the field optimism about the potential for positive momentum in the years ahead.

We hope the data and information presented in this deck empowers researchers, policymakers, and funders to make informed investments in rural communities and schools.

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Acknowledgments

Bellwether Education Partners would like to thank the Walton Family Foundation for its support of this project.

Any errors are the responsibility of the authors alone.