

Center for Public Education



# Urban Student Characteristics and Urban School Challenges: What High-Quality Education for Every Student Means

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## 2024 Report

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## Introduction: Urban Schools and Public Perception

Traditionally, researchers use “City” data to study urban students and urban schools. In this context, the public perception has been that “urban schools” are failing to educate the students that they serve; “urban students achieve less in school, attain less education, and encounter less success in the labor market later in life” ([NCES, 1996](#)). This perception, however, has been challenged since the 1990s.

- An early study by the U.S. Department of Education reported that “in every domain of students’ lives studied student background characteristics, school experiences, and student outcomes — there were instances where urban [defined as City] students and schools were similar to their non-urban counterparts after accounting for poverty concentration, suggesting that some of the often-cited bleak perceptions of urban schools and students may be overstated” ([Lippman et al., 1996](#)).
- In 2021, the Council of the Great City Schools published a [report](#) that further challenges misperceptions about “urban” schools. The study found that “after considering differences in poverty, language status, race/ethnicity, disability, educational resources in the home, and parental education, Large City Schools had reading and mathematics scores on NAEP [i.e., the Nation’s Report Card] that were significantly above statistical expectations at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels in 2019” ([Cassery et al., 2021](#)).

### How We Define Urban

“When people think about their community they don’t pull out a map to determine whether it’s urban or suburban — they’re thinking about the lived experience” ([Kimelberg, 2018](#)). Perception is often reality, but perception may not always be accurate in a technical sense. To get a better snapshot of urban students, we use a broader concept to define urban in this report, which includes all students attending schools in non-rural areas, i.e., cities, suburbs, and towns.

#### Urban — City, Suburb, and Town

The [Census Bureau](#) uses urban-rural classification to delineate geographic areas. Urban areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other nonresidential urban land uses. The boundaries of this urban footprint have been defined using measures based primarily on population counts and residential population density, but also through criteria that account for non-residential urban land uses, such as commercial, industrial, transportation, and open space that are part of the urban landscape ([NCES, 2019](#)).

#### Either Urban or Rural

The National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES](#)) uses a locale classification, a general geographic indicator that describes the type of area where a school is located. The classifications rely on standard urban and rural designations defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Although NCES classifies all territory in the U.S. into four types (i.e., Rural, Town, Suburban, and City), each type of locale is either urban or rural in its entirety. In other words, Town, Suburban, and City are urban.

#### Urban Covers Urbanized Areas and Urban Clusters

Urban area boundaries are constructed from qualifying census tracts and census blocks. To qualify as an urban area, the territory must encompass at least 2,500 people, of which at least 1,500 people reside outside institutional group quarters ([Geverdt, 2019](#)). Urban areas that contain 50,000 or more people are designated as Urbanized Areas (UAs); urban areas that contain at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people are designated as Urban Clusters (UCs). The term “urban area” refers to both UAs and UCs.

It should be noted that the Census Bureau demarcates urban areas after each decennial census. Since the 1950 Census, the Census Bureau has reviewed and revised the urban criteria, as necessary, for each decennial census. Recently, the bureau updated the definition of urban area. Now, each urban area must encompass at least 2,000 housing units or at least 5,000 people ([2020 Census Urban Areas FAQs, 2022](#)).

## Why This Report

Data still show that students in city schools are more likely to face challenges such as poverty, difficulty speaking English, and numerous health and safety risks. Yet, the trend is that these challenges are spreading to schools in suburbs, towns, and even rural areas. To better understand strengths and challenges commonly shared by students in urban public schools, the Center for Public Education (CPE) of the National School Boards Association compiled this first data-driven report on urban education. To inform urban school leaders, we will update this report annually.

## Our Research Questions

In the U.S., more than 39.1 million students attend non-rural public schools. Approximately 80% of public-school students are urban. We examined national and state data from multiple sources, to try and answer the following research questions:

- What are some characteristics shared by urban students?
- What are some common challenges that urban schools are facing regarding educational equity?
- What does it mean to provide high-quality education for every student in urban schools?



## Three Parts of the Report

Based on our research questions, we organized data and information in three main sections:

- In Part I, we present data about urban student demographics, learning experiences, and family support, and synthesize seven characteristics of urban students.
- In Part II, we follow the educational equity framework created by CPE in 2016 and supply relevant data in five areas where urban schools are challenged when providing high-quality education for every student.
- In Part III, we use an individual's successful story to further discuss what is meant by "high-quality education for every student," particularly for students living in urban areas who are often considered disadvantaged because of factors related to socioeconomic status and family background, such as race/ethnicity, poverty, mental health issues, living in a single-parent household or a high-crime neighborhood.

Additionally, we included nine policy/practice discussion boxes in the report. Through the discussion boxes, we encourage readers to consider new ideas, various perspectives, and different strategies about improving student performance. We also acknowledge that our research has limitations, which are discussed in the "Technical Notes" section.

In summary, we use data to draw a national picture of urban students, but we are aware that diversity is certainly the best description of urban students and urban schools. It is our hope that by presenting a wide spectrum of information, examples, and resources, school leaders may develop more understanding of urban students, gain confidence, and find solutions to meet their district challenges and foster a culture in which every student is inspired to learn and grow.

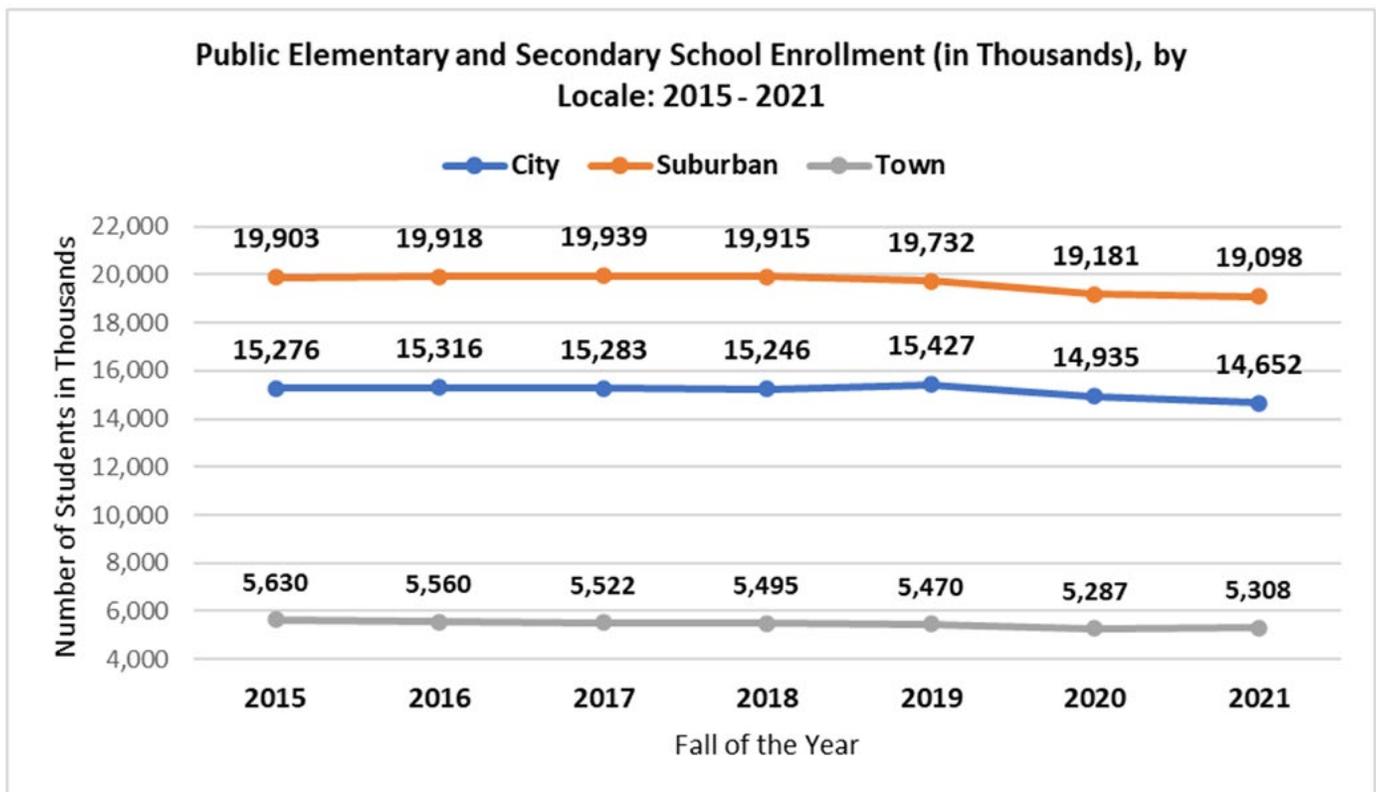


## Part I: Seven Characteristics of Urban Students

1. **Urban students are demographically and culturally diverse.**
2. **The number of urban students from immigrant households is growing substantially.**
3. **Urban students living in poverty: The population has been spreading in schools.**
4. **Urban students are supported by parents with high expectations.**
5. **Urban students have a wide variety of in-school and after-school programs.**
6. **Urban students have more chances to learn from educators with high credentials.**
7. **Urban students have more access to learning in the digital age.**

In 2021, more than 39.1 million students (80%) attended public schools in cities, suburbs, or towns. About half of urban students go to school in suburban areas. Overall, urban schools have seen a decrease in student enrollment for a decade. Between 2015 and 2021, suburban school enrollment decreased by 4% from nearly 20 million students to 19 million; in cities, enrollment also decreased by 4% from 15.3 million to 14.7 million; in towns, enrollment decreased by 6% from 5.6 million to 5.3 million (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number (in Thousands) of Students Enrolled in Public Schools, by Locale: Year 2015-2021



Source: NCES [Table 214.40](#) prepared in 2022.

Many factors contribute to the decrease in urban school enrollment. One reason is that the birth rate in the U.S. is dropping: “The number of young children overall has declined—between 2010 and 2021, the population of children under 5 fell by more than 1.3 million, or 6.8%, and in 2019 alone, it fell by 207,000, or 1%” ([Ozimek and O’Brien, 2022](#)). Another reason cited recently is the pandemic, which caused some families to leave urban areas because of “loss of a job, a new ability to work remotely, fears of contracting COVID, and shuttered city amenities” ([Barnum, 2022](#)).

We don’t know if the enrollment decline in urban schools will continue, but these public schools still play a critical role in providing education access to all students, particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds. “Public schools are far from perfect, but they still offer significant benefits to the students that attend their classrooms every day” ([Chen, 2023](#)). To gain a clearer understanding of urban students in the U.S., we studied data about students in cities, suburban areas, and towns, and compared them with their rural peers or, in some cases, private schools. Data show that while urban students are diverse, many share the following seven characteristics:

## **1. Urban students are demographically and culturally diverse.**

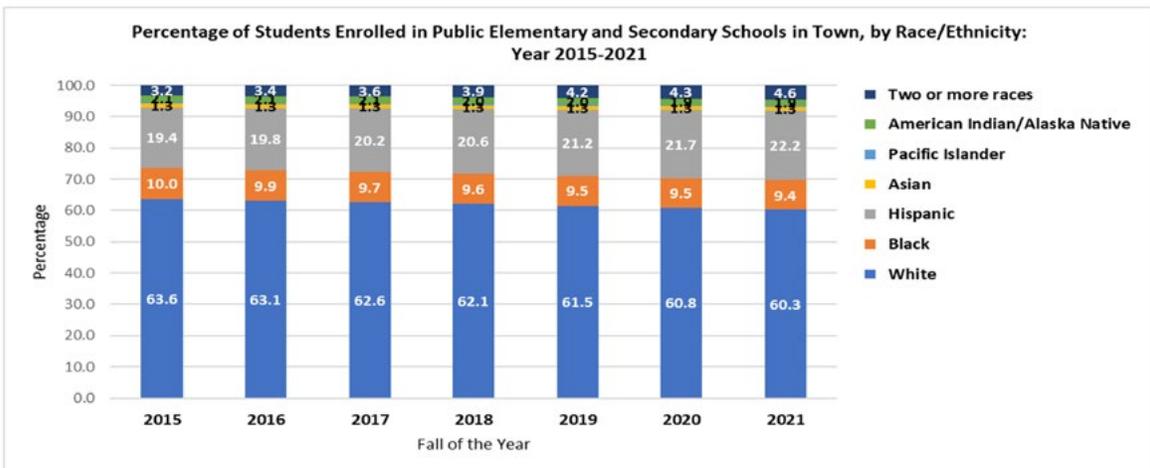
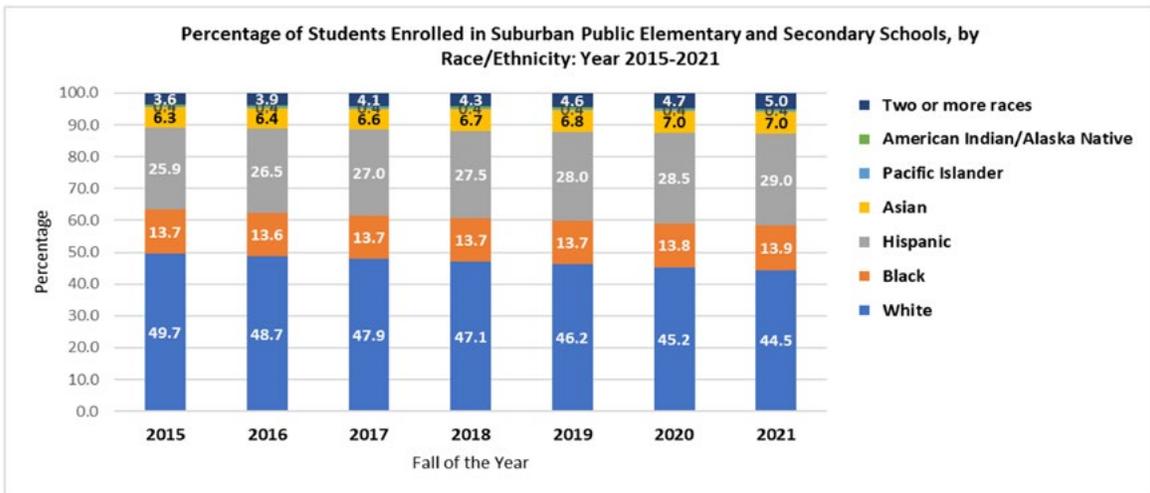
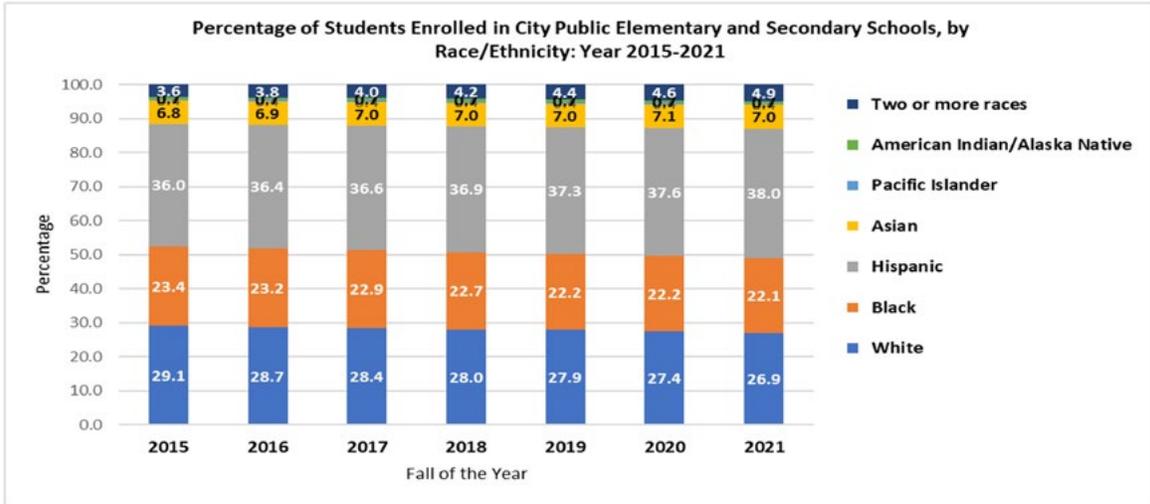
Most urban students are non-White. For the last decade, there has been a substantial decrease in White students and a significant increase in non-White students in cities, suburban areas, and towns (Figure 2). In 2021, nearly 3 in 4 students in city schools, more than half of the student population in suburban schools, and 2 in 5 students in town schools were non-White.

- Hispanic students are the largest racial/ethnic minority group, followed by Black students. In cities, 3 in 5 students were either Hispanic (38%) or Black (22%). In suburban schools, 2 in 5 students were either Hispanic (29%) or Black (14%). In schools located in towns, 22% of students were Hispanic and more than 9% of students are Black.
- Asian students constituted 7% of city school enrollment and 7% of suburban school enrollment.
- Approximately 5% of urban students (across all urban locations, i.e., city, suburb, town) were multiracial.

Urban students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, as each race encompasses a multitude of different ethnic groups. “From African Americans to Russian Americans, the United States is one of the most diverse nations in terms of culture” ([Belfield, n.d.](#)). Urban school districts often proudly celebrate this American heritage and see it as an advantage. Consider these examples from district websites:

- Fairfax County Public Schools ([FCPS, Virginia](#)): “We serve a diverse student population of more than 181,000 students in grades prekindergarten through 12, speaking over 200 languages.”
- Aurora Public Schools ([APS, Colorado](#)): “Our students come from more than 130 countries and speak more than 160 languages.”
- Omaha Public Schools ([OPS, Nebraska](#)): “We serve more than 51,000 young people in a welcoming, diverse school district community. ... Our student population speaks more than 100 different languages.”
- Dodge City Public Schools ([DCPS, Kansas](#)): “Overall, student home languages consist of 20 different languages and our students come to us from 45 different countries.”
- Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township ([Indiana](#)): “Serving over 16,000 students in 21 buildings, Lawrence is a residential suburban community of 95,000+ and home to Fort Benjamin Harrison State Park and Geist Reservoir. With families from widely diverse cultural, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds, the Lawrence community values and embraces diversity as one of its greatest strengths.”

Figure 2. Urban Student Demographics: Year 2015-2021

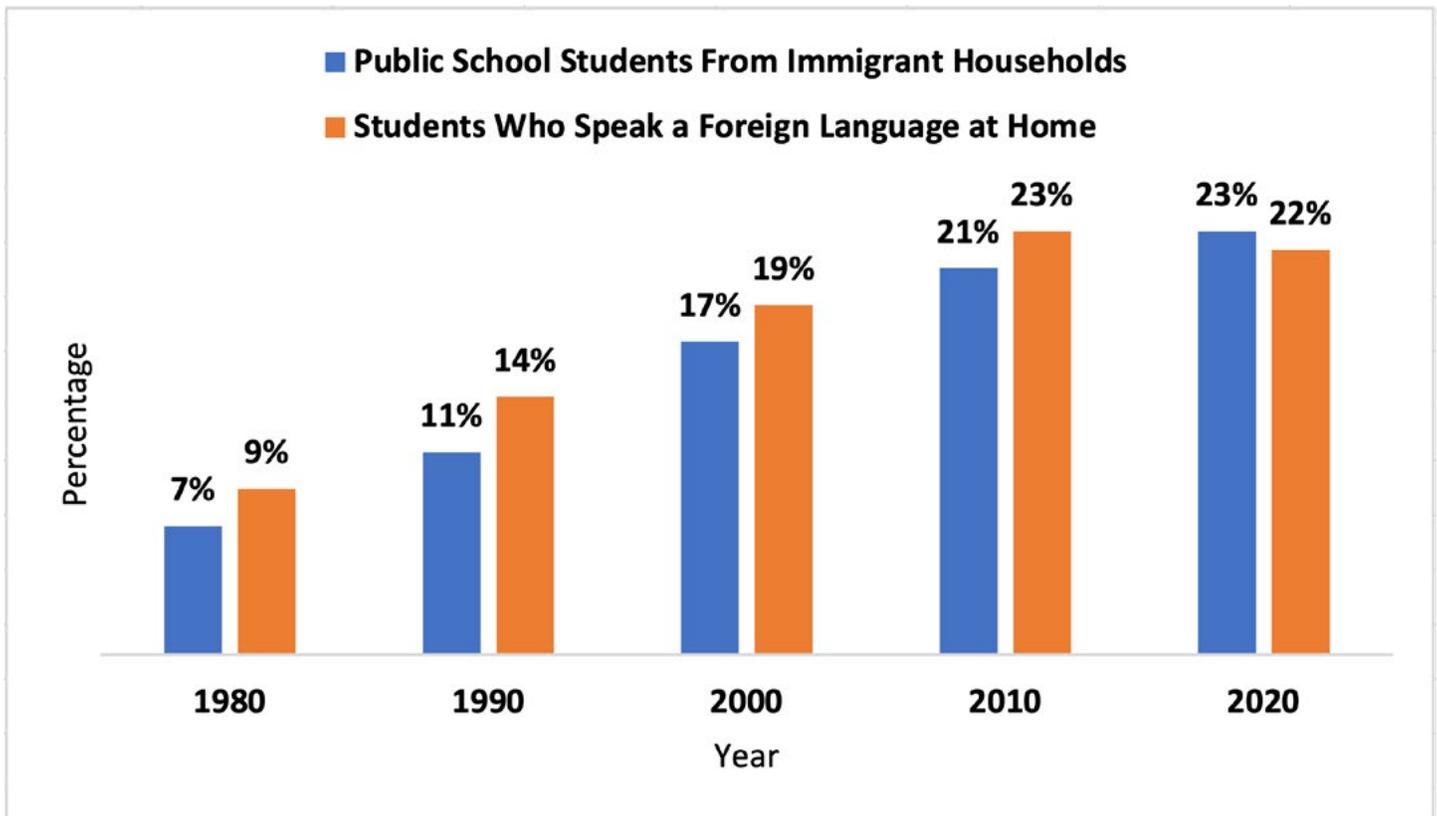


Source: NCES [Table 214.40](#) prepared in 2022

## 2. The number of urban students from immigrant households is growing.

Nearly 1 in 4 public school students in the U.S. live in a household headed by an immigrant, also referred to as a foreign-born person. Most of these students attend urban schools. In 2021, 11 million public school students were from immigrant-headed households ([Camarota et al., 2023](#)). Compared with the 1980s and 1990s, the current percentage of students who speak a foreign language at home as their first language doubled, then tripled (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of Public School Students From Immigrant Households and Percentage of Students From Both Immigrant and Native Households Who Speak a Foreign Language at Home: Year 1980-2020



Source: [Mapping the Impact of Immigration on Public Schools \(cis.org\)](#)

Researchers ([Camarota et al., 2023](#)) found that about 12% of the areas in the U.S. (i.e. the Census Bureau-designated public use microdata areas or PUMAs) had a population where more than half of the students were from immigrant households. These areas with heavy concentration of new immigrant households were in New York, Florida, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Texas, Massachusetts, and Virginia (Table 1). In many of the nation’s largest metropolitan areas, students from immigrant households account for a high percentage of public school enrollment.

Table 1. Urban Areas With a Heavy Concentration of Students From Immigrant Households: 2021

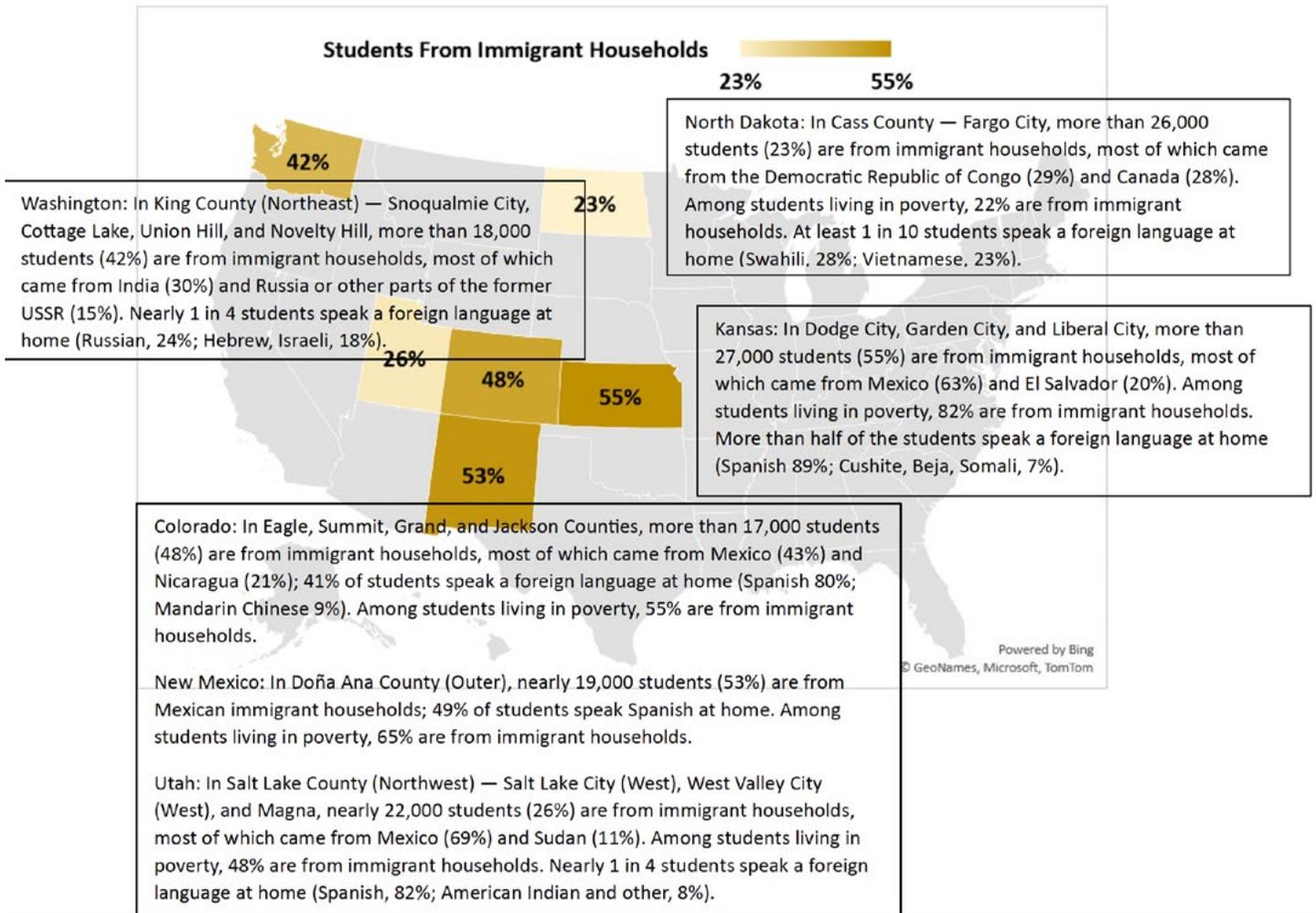
| Urban Area   | Students from Immigrant Households | State                                   |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Elmhurst and South Corona, New York City                                       | 96%                                | New York                                |
| Northeast Dade County, North Central Hialeah City                              | 87%                                | Florida                                 |
| Los Angeles County (Central), Los Angeles City, Koreatown                      | 83%                                | California                              |
| Prince George's County (Northwest), College Park City, and Langley Park        | 82%                                | Maryland                                |
| Union County (Northeast), Elizabeth City                                       | 79%                                | New Jersey                              |
| Houston City (West), Westpark Tollway, West of Beltway TX-8                    | 78%                                | Texas                                   |
| Suffolk County (North), Revere, Chelsea, and Winthrop                          | 74%                                | Massachusetts                           |
| Fairfax County (East Central), Annandale, W. Falls Church, Bailey's Crossroads | 73%                                | Virginia                                |
| San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara   | 59%                                | California                              |
| Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach  | 56%                                | Florida                                 |
| Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim   | 52%                                | California                              |
| San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward  | 48%                                | California                              |
| New York-Newark-Jersey City  | 47%                                | New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania      |
| Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land   | 42%                                | Texas                                   |
| Washington-Arlington-Alexandria  | 39%                                | D.C., Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia |
| Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington  | 35%                                | Texas                                   |
| Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue  | 34%                                | Washington                              |

Source: [Mapping the Impact of Immigration on Public Schools \(cis.org\)](#)

It should be noted that school districts in the Midwest and the West (e.g., Colorado, Kansas, North Dakota, and Utah), which traditionally had fewer foreign-born households, have begun to experience a high percentage of public school students from new immigrant households (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Areas With a High Concentration of Students From New Immigrant Households in Public Schools in Selected States in the Midwest and the West: 2021



Source: [Mapping the Impact of Immigration on Public Schools \(cis.org\)](https://www.cis.org/)

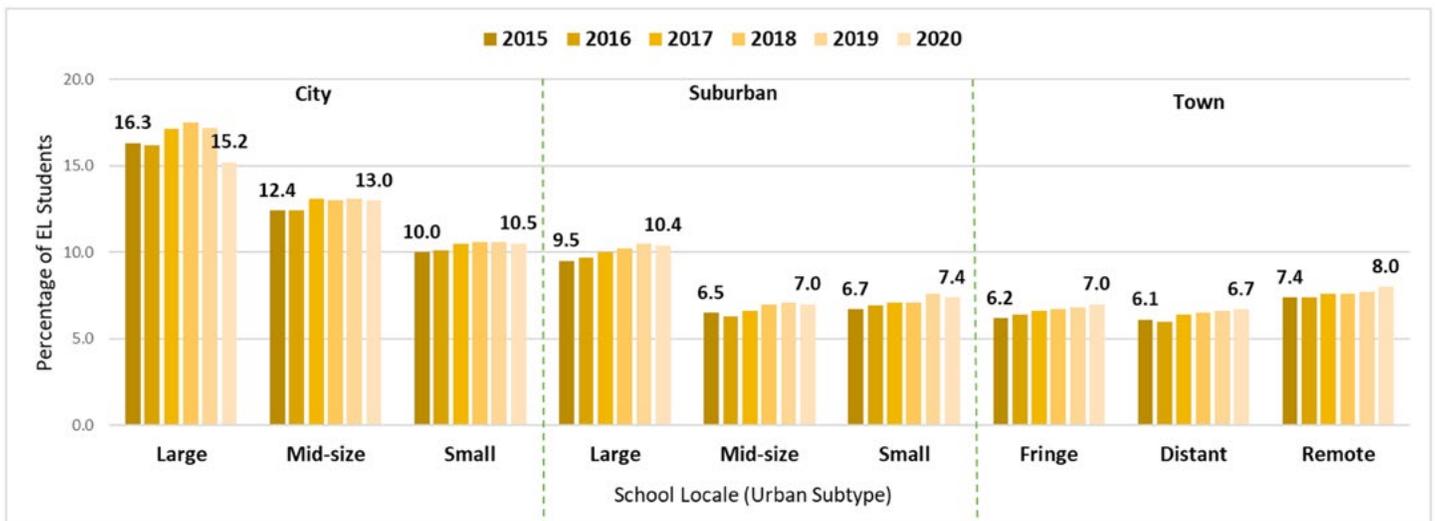
The rapid increase in the number of new immigrants in urban areas has led to the growth of English learners (EL) in schools. Researchers find that the biggest growth in the EL student population has been in rural and suburban school systems. A study titled “Suburban Schools: The Unrecognized Frontier in Public Education” (Gill et al., 2016) reports the following cases:

- Five suburbs of Boston saw increases in EL populations from 50% to 200% between 2006 and 2010.
- In Highline Public Schools, just outside of Seattle, the number of EL students tripled, from 7% to 21%.
- In neighboring Kent, Washington, in the past decade the EL student population grew nearly five times, from 3% to 14%, in a system of 27,000 students.
- In Minnesota’s suburbs, half of the EL population are refugees, which brings challenges beyond just navigating language barriers.

The percentage of EL students is often much higher for school districts in more urbanized locales than for those in less urbanized locales (Irwin et al., 2023). ELs constituted an average of 14% of total public-school enrollment in cities; 10% in suburban areas; and 7% in towns. There has been a growing trend of EL students in schools in mid-sized and small cities, and suburban schools (Figure 5).

- The proportion of EL students in remote towns increased to 8% (119,000 students), which surpassed the percentages in mid-sized and small suburban schools, as well as non-remote towns.
- Public schools in large suburban areas have seen a rapid increase in the number of EL students (increased by 72,000 students) between 2015 and 2020.

Figure 5. Percentage of English Learner (EL) Students Enrolled in Public Schools, by School Locale: Year 2015-2020



Source: NCES Table 214.40 prepared in 2022



### Urban Subtypes Used in NCES Data

While NCES classifies all territory in the U.S. into four types (Rural, Town, Suburban, and City), each type is divided into three subtypes based on population size or proximity to populated areas. In this report, we use urban and its subtypes as [defined](#) by NCES.

- City — Large: Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population of 250,000 or more.
- City — Midsize: Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
- City — Small: Territory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with population less than 100,000.
- Suburban — Large: Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population of 250,000 or more.
- Suburban — Midsize: Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.
- Suburban — Small: Territory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area with population less than 100,000.
- Town — Fringe: Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an Urbanized Area.
- Town — Distant: Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.
- Town — Remote: Territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.



## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 1: What School Districts With Large EL Populations Do

### ESOL/Bilingual Programs in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS, Maryland)

“Will my child attend specific classes to learn English?”

“How will my child learn English and continue progressing in other subject areas?”

“What help will my child receive to cope with changes in language of instruction, school culture, and the stresses of living in a new country?”

Parents often ask these questions when they register their children in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). In 2022, MCPS had 30,614 EL students, 19% of [MCPS enrollment](#). MCPS provides the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program for every student who needs it. The goal of the ESOL program is to help ESOL students develop proficiency in academic English, which is needed to be successful in school, college, future workplace, and as citizens.

MCPS leaders and educators believe that the education of students learning English as a new language is a collaborative responsibility shared by the ESOL teacher, the classroom teacher, all other appropriate MCPS staff, as well as the ESOL student. According to [MCPS](#), “Structured, systematic English language development instruction supports the annual measurable achievement objective (AMAO) in progress in and attainment of English language proficiency, as well as adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading, math, and science.”

The following steps have been taken by [MCPS](#) to serve EL students and their families:

- 1) **Serve EL students and their families from registration on.** Students begin the enrollment process in the local schools if they were born in the United States and have not attended schools in another country during the past two years. All other students begin the enrollment process in the International Admissions and Enrollment Office (IAE). Based on information parents provide about a student’s home language, the district may be required by law to administer the state-mandated English language proficiency assessment. Assessment results determine eligibility and influence placement in an English language development program. These programs are designed to support English language learners as they acquire academic Standard American English and progress in mastering the MCPS curriculum in all other subject areas.
- 2) **Develop rigorous curricula.** The district has developed rigorous curricula to help elementary, middle, and high school English learners to acquire the academic English that is critical to their success in school. All English Language Development (ELD) curriculum resources are organized around the academic language needed for success in reading/language arts, social studies, and science. ELD instruction occurs for a portion of the instructional day and is offered in addition to the student’s regular instructional program.
- 3) **Provide parent outreach programs.** The ELD Parent Outreach Team provides multilingual outreach services in the community to parents of EL students to enable them to engage fully in the MCPS instructional program. The team provides regular services for groups of parents, as well as personal and individual support.

## Dual Language Across All Grades in Topeka Public Schools (TPS, Kansas)

TPS is one of the largest and most diverse school districts in Kansas, with a student enrollment that is approximately 38% White, 32% Hispanic, 17% African American, and 13% other races/ethnicities. Currently, 78% of the 13,100-student population rely on free or reduced-price lunches; 400 students are considered homeless.

The Hispanic population in TPS has steadily increased every year since 2008. The district responded by broadening its scope to provide more diverse and inclusive instructional offerings to students within and beyond the district's attendance area and started a cohort dual language model at the elementary level in 2009, at the middle school level in 2016, and at the high school level in 2019. Topeka Public Schools graduated its first class of dual language scholars in spring 2022.

The preschool-to-12th grade dual language program integrates native English-speaking students with native Spanish-speaking students for academic instruction, which is presented in both languages. In dual language classrooms, each teacher speaks only in the designated language and communicates using a range of research-based and engaging strategies to promote student understanding and language development. Students in the program demonstrate skillfulness at acquiring language in meaningful contexts through reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking in two languages.

"Topeka Public School's dual language program has reduced linguistic barriers while increasing cognitive, social, and economic opportunities for ALL its students. It is the primary reason my children attend this amazing school district," says Topeka school board member Melanie Stuart-Campbell.

"Our dual language program develops globally competitive leaders for the future as our scholars graduate with bilingual and biliteracy skills," says Topeka Superintendent Tiffany Anderson. "I am so grateful for the courage of our school board members as advocates for equity in supporting the establishment of the first and only K-12 dual language program in Kansas."

The budget for this program is a standard school-based budget, and includes \$60,000, which is the cost of a dual language coordinator. The dual language program represents about 9% of the TPS's total budget. As a result of this investment, the district has witnessed higher student achievement on the State Report Card:

- Improvement in literacy across all grade levels from 2018 to 2020.
- A 4% increase in exceeding English language arts standards for dual language third graders.
- About 30% proficiency growth in low-income, special education, and English learner populations.
- A 6% growth of exceeding standards in math on state assessments.

### 3. Urban students living in poverty: The population has been spreading throughout schools.

Two measures are often used to describe students living in poverty. One is “Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch” (FRL) ([NCES, 2023](#)). The percentage of students attending public schools with different poverty concentrations varied by school locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, and rural). In the fall of 2021, more than one-third of students who attended city schools (36%) were in high-poverty schools measured by FRL, which was greater than the percentage among those who attended town schools (18%), suburban schools (15%), and rural schools (13%).

Another measure to detect students living in poverty is through family poverty rate. According to [NCES](#), “A family is in poverty if its income falls below the Census Bureau’s poverty threshold, which is a dollar amount that varies depending on a family’s size and composition and is updated annually to account for inflation.” The family poverty rate of 5- to 17-year-olds is the percentage of children in this age group whose families are in poverty.

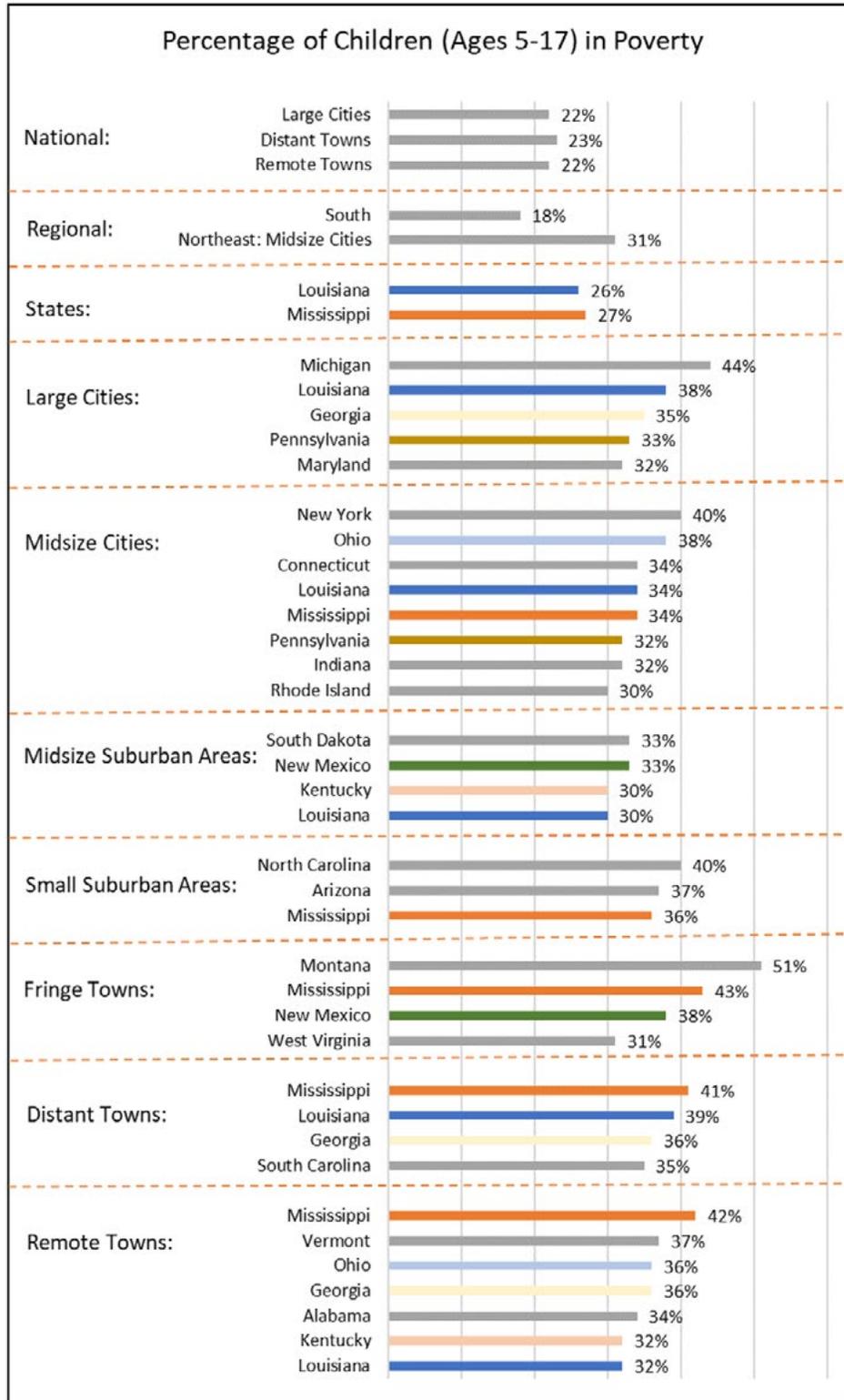
#### A Snapshot of Children Ages 5-17 Living in Poverty in the U.S.

Nationwide, large cities, distant towns, and remote towns have higher family poverty rates than other urban subtypes (Figure 6). In 2019, at least 1 in 5 children lived in poverty in those urban areas. Regionally, the South had a higher poverty rate, compared with other regions. Mississippi and Louisiana had higher poverty rates, compared with other states.

- In Montana, the family poverty rate in fringe towns was 51%.
- In Michigan, the family poverty rate in large cities was 44%.
- In North Carolina, the family poverty rate in small suburban areas was 40%.
- In Vermont, the family poverty rate in remote towns was 37%.
- In New Mexico, the family poverty rate in midsize suburban areas was 33%.



Figure 6. High Family Poverty Rate (Percentage of Children Living in Poverty) at National, Regional, and State Levels: 2019



Source: [NCES Table 102.45 prepared in 2021](#)

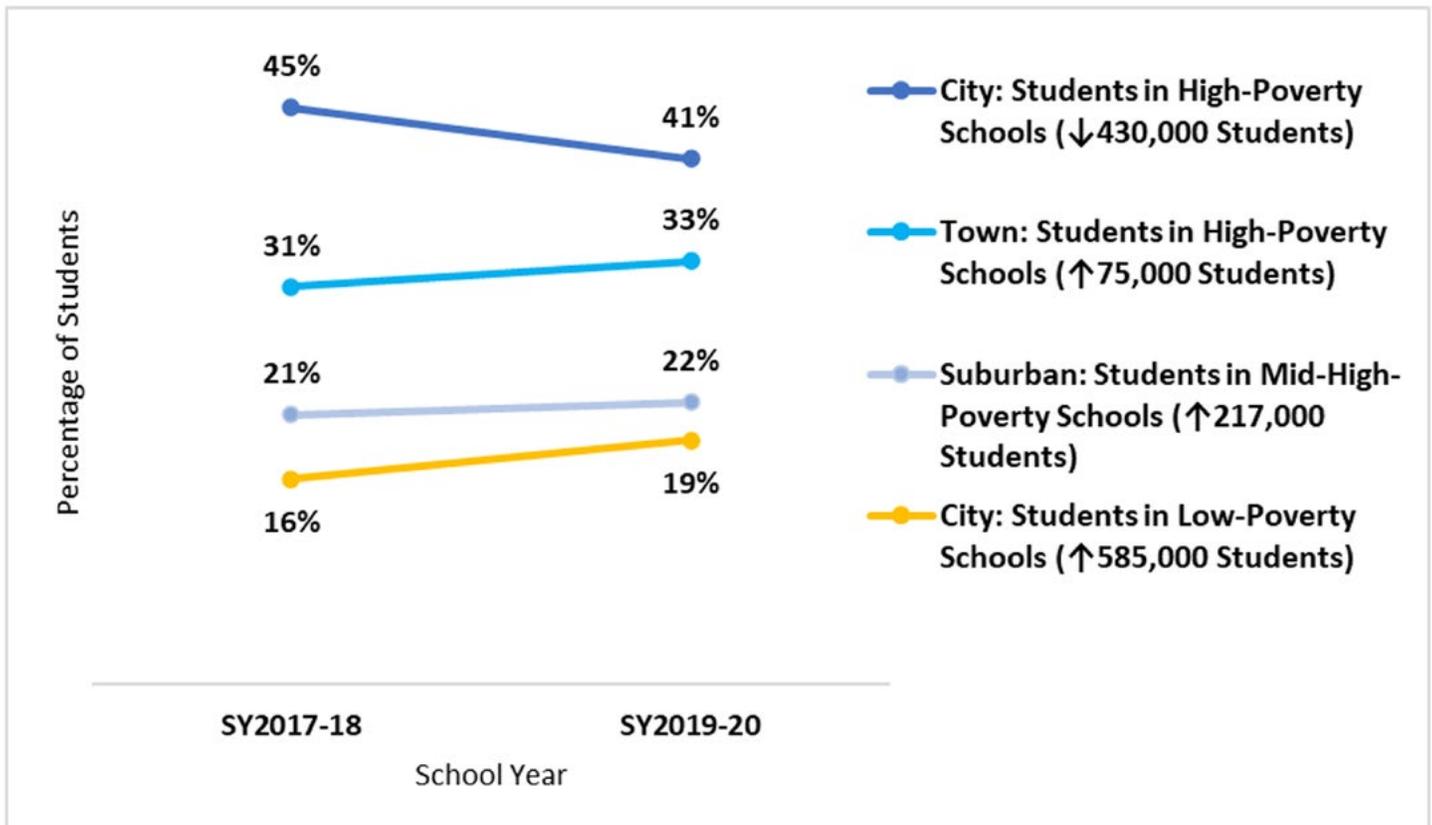
## Family poverty rates in urban school districts

Nationwide, approximately a quarter of students attend no-poverty public schools (i.e., schools located in a district where the family poverty rate is 0% – 8.619%). A quarter of students attend low-poverty schools (i.e., located in a district where the family poverty rate is 8.620% – 14.505%). A quarter of students attend mid-high poverty schools (i.e., a district with a family poverty rate of 14.506% – 20.485%). The remaining quarter of students attend high-poverty schools (i.e., a district with a family poverty rate of 20.486% and more).

Using this benchmark, we examined data of urban school districts for the 2017-18 and 2019-20 school years. We found some notable changes between 2018 and 2020 (Figure 7):

- In city districts, there was a decrease in the number of students attending high-poverty schools, but an increase in the number of students attending low-poverty schools.
- In suburban districts, there was an increase in the number of students attending mid-high-poverty schools.
- In districts located in towns, there was an increase in the number of students attending high-poverty schools.

Figure 7. Percentage of Students in Schools With Different Level of Poverty, by School Locale: SY 2017-18 vs. SY2019-20



Source: NCES Table 203.75 prepared in 2019 and 2022.

#### 4. Urban students are supported by parents with high expectations.

Parent and family engagement in the educational lives of children and youth positively influence student learning and achievement ([Horsford and Holmes-Sutton, 2012](#)). Data show a growing trend that urban parents spend time doing education-related activities with their children (Table 2). For instance, between 2012 and 2019, elementary school students whose parents spent time with their children doing arts/crafts (68% vs. 78% in cities; 67% vs. 79% in towns) and playing board games/puzzles (64% vs. 76% in cities; 58% vs. 75% in towns) increased by at least 10 percentage points.

Table 2. Percentage of Kindergartners Through Fifth Graders Whose Parents Reported Doing Education-Related Activities With Their Children in the Previous Week, by School Locale: 2012, 2016, and 2019

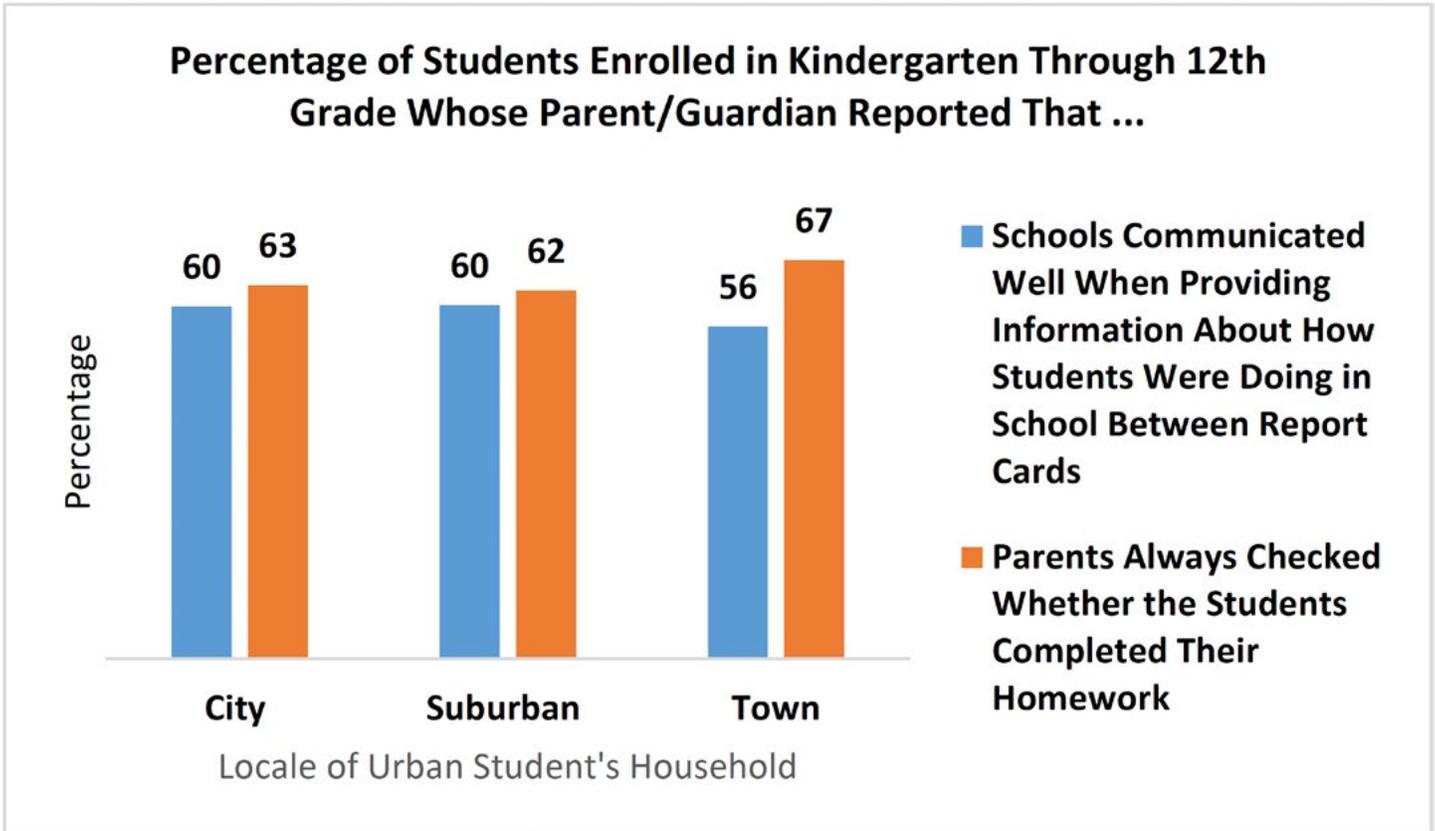
|          | Told child a story |      |      | Did arts and crafts |      |      | Discussed family history/ethnic heritage |      |      | Played board games or did puzzles |      |      |
|----------|--------------------|------|------|---------------------|------|------|--|------|------|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| Year     | 2012               | 2016 | 2019 | 2012                | 2016 | 2019 | 2012                                     | 2016 | 2019 | 2012                              | 2016 | 2019 |
| City     | 69                 | 73   | 75   | 68                  | 70   | 78   | 55                                       | 57   | 57   | 64                                | 67   | 76   |
| Suburban | 72                 | 73   | 74   | 68                  | 70   | 73   | 50                                       | 53   | 52   | 65                                | 68   | 73   |
| Town     | 65                 | 71   | 75   | 67                  | 64   | 79   | 49                                       | 43   | 47   | 58                                | 65   | 75   |

Source: [NCES Table 207.30](#) prepared in 2020.

Most urban parents want to know about their children’s academic performance and progress in school, and if possible, to help their children with homework. In 2019, parents of about 60% of students in urban schools reported that they were satisfied with how their children’s schools provided information about student performance, in addition to regular report cards (Figure 8). Nearly two-thirds of students’ parents said that they always check to see whether their children complete their homework.



Figure 8. Percentage of Urban K-12 Students Whose Parents Were Satisfied That Schools Provided Information About How Students Were Doing in School and Percentage of Urban Students Whose Parents Always Checked Whether Their Children Completed Homework: 2019



Source: National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), [2019](#) and [2019](#)

In 2019, approximately one-third of urban parents were not very satisfied with their children’s schools. Table 3 shows some reasons why these parents wanted to change their children’s schools. Around 80% of the parents expected high-quality educators (i.e., teachers, principal, or other school staff) to educate their children. Around 60% of the parents looked for high-quality curricula or unique academic programs (e.g., language immersion, STEM focus). Around half of them would like their children to attend a school where most students have high academic performance (such as test scores, dropout rates, and so on).

Table 3. Among K-12 Urban Students Whose Parents Considered Other Schools for Their Children, Percentage of Students Whose Parents Rated as “Very Important” Factors Used to Select Child’s School: 2018–19

| Locale of Student’s Household | Quality of Educators | High-Quality Curriculum | Student Academic Performance |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| City                          | 77%                  | 60%                     | 50%                          |
| Suburban                      | 81%                  | 61%                     | 58%                          |
| Town                          | 78%                  | 57%                     | 49%                          |

Note: \*Non-Hispanic. Source: [Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2019](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic attracted more public attention to parents’ concerns about their children’s education. The [U.S. Department of Education](#) has been collecting information on the impact of the pandemic from a national sample of K-12 public schools. [Data](#) show that 81% of public schools (85% of city, 84% of suburban, 67% of town, and 80% of rural schools) reported that parents expressed concerns about their students meeting academic standards. Additionally, 79% of public schools (78% of city, 85% of suburban, 78% of town, and 75% of rural schools) reported that parents worried about the students’ social, emotional, and mental health.

The fact that urban parents have high expectations for their children also can be observed from how they pursue after-school programs for their children. For example, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, [Afterschool Alliance](#), reported ([2021](#)) that parents in cities placed greater importance on after-school programs offering science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning. Half the parents in cities expressed that STEM learning is extremely important in the selection of their children’s after-school programs, compared with 35% of rural parents and 38% of suburban parents.



## 5. Urban students have a wide variety of in-school and after-school programs.

Compared with private schools, public schools in urban areas generally have more in-school and after-school programs to support all students. For example, in the 2017-18 school year:

- More than half of urban schools provided instruction beyond a normal school day for students in need (vs. [37% of private schools](#)).
- About 40% of urban public schools provided instruction beyond the normal school day for students who sought academic advancement and enrichment (vs. 30% of private schools).
- More than 80% of public schools in urban areas offered school-related extracurricular activities (vs. 66% of private schools).

According to [federal data](#) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most urban schools provided in-school and after-school learning programs in the 2022-23 school year, based on student assessment data (Table 4). To mitigate the learning loss caused by the pandemic, most urban schools offered tailored accelerated instruction (i.e., teacher-led individualized learning, using new, grade-level content to teach prior-grade concepts or skills), remedial instruction (i.e., using content from prior years to teach concepts or skills), tutoring services, summer schools, and after-school learning programs.

Table 4. Percentage of Public Schools That Offer In-School and After-School Learning Programs, by School's Urban Locale: 2022

| Program That Public Schools Offer   | City | Suburban | Town |
|---|------|----------|------|
| Tailored Accelerated Instruction  | 69%  | 57%      | 57%  |
| Remedial Instruction  | 82%  | 81%      | 84%  |
| Identifying Individual Needs with Diagnostic Assessment Data                        | 87%  | 88%      | 87%  |
| Identifying Individual Needs with Formative Assessment Data                         | 89%  | 86%      | 79%  |
| Family Engagement/Outreach Activities   | 54%  | 41%      | 36%  |
| Tutoring (High-Dosage, Standard, Self-Paced, Other Methods)                         | 87%  | 81%      | 84%  |
| Summer School (Required for Certain Students)                                       | 66%  | 73%      | 75%  |
| Summer Learning or Enrichment Hosted by the Student School or District              | 72%  | 70%      | 74%  |
| After-School Program Providing Instruction to Students Who Need Academic Assistance | 63%  | 50%      | 61%  |
| After-School Program Providing Instruction to Students Who Seek Academic Enrichment | 57%  | 38%      | 44%  |
| After-School Program (School-Related Activities and Clubs)                          | 77%  | 73%      | 70%  |

Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

The American School District Panel ([ASDP](#)) — “the first and only nationally representative sample of school district leaders” — reports data on whether school districts have partners that offer after-school programs. ASDP uses three-location categories of school districts (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural). According to ASDP, in the 2022-23 school year, 76% of urban school districts and 68% of suburban districts reported that one or more schools in their districts offered after-school programs that were provided by an external partner (vs. 30% of rural districts); 100% of urban districts and 83% of suburban districts reported that they sponsored summer programs for students in 2022 (vs. 82% of rural districts). Another source, Afterschool Alliance, [reports](#) (2021) that parents in cities (79%) are more likely to report that their children have STEM learning opportunities in their after-school programs, compared with suburban (72%) and rural (70%) parents.



## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 2: How Urban Districts Serve Students With High-Quality Programs

### **The Essential Experiences<sup>SM</sup> in Akron Public Schools (Ohio)**

Akron Public Schools (APS) is home to 20,627 students in 45 schools. Most students are non-White (71%), including 47% Black, 10% multi-race, 9% Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% Hispanic. To enhance students' field trip experience, APS developed the Essential Experiences<sup>SM</sup> program through collaboration with a local philanthropic organization and several community partners.

The program provides elementary school students with a common, meaningful experience outside the classroom. Students in preschool through fifth grade visit one of seven local cultural or historical organizations and participate in custom-designed educational programming directly connected to their classroom learning. Each school year, over 9,000 students deepen connections to their community, build skills through inquiry, and are exposed to career possibilities through this program.

The district's curriculum teams worked with partners to create meaningful pre- and post-experience activities for all field visits. Program surveys show that most educators felt that the experiences complemented classroom learning well and that the program provided a positive learning environment for all students.

### **Oklahoma Aviation Academy in Norman Public Schools (Oklahoma)**

Norman is a college town, home to the University of Oklahoma, and a suburb of Oklahoma City. The school district, Norman Public Schools (NPS), has roughly 16,000 students in a community of 100,000 people. The district's student demographics are: 55% White, 16% Hispanic, 14% multiracial, 7% Black, 5% Native American, and 3% Asian American. About 52% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Working with the University of Oklahoma, the Moore Norman Technology Center, and industry partners from the public and private sectors, the district is capitalizing on Norman's geographic location and aviation history by creating a program for high school students.

NPS offers career and technical education (CTE) for all students. The district created a comprehensive science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) academy themed around aviation and aerospace. This program provides industry-connected education pathways for students to connect directly with higher education, career tech, and industry partners, ensuring career readiness in the high-demand areas of aviation and aerospace.

The academy blends cutting-edge STEAM experiences, innovative industry connections, and world-class academics against a backdrop of aviation and aerospace. During the program, students are guided in the development of a culture of excellence that promotes intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues through exposure to learning experiences designed to foster deep thinking and cultivate the critical skills needed to thrive in the 21st century. The program empowers students to take control of their personal journey toward a life of meaning and purpose.

In 2022, the Oklahoma Aviation Academy's freshman class of 80 students attended class at the Max Westheimer Airport in Norman. Plans are underway to construct a stand-alone facility on the airport grounds that could house up to 800 students. The district has received overwhelming support through grants from partners such as Boeing and the Norman Economic Development Coalition. This support allows the district to move forward with plans for the construction of the facility and to make the program and curriculum available virtually statewide.

Source: [2023 Magna Awards Silver Award Winners and Honorable Mentions \(nsba.org\)](https://www.nsba.org/2023-magna-awards-silver-award-winners-and-honorable-mentions)

## 6. Urban students have more chances to learn from educators with high credentials.

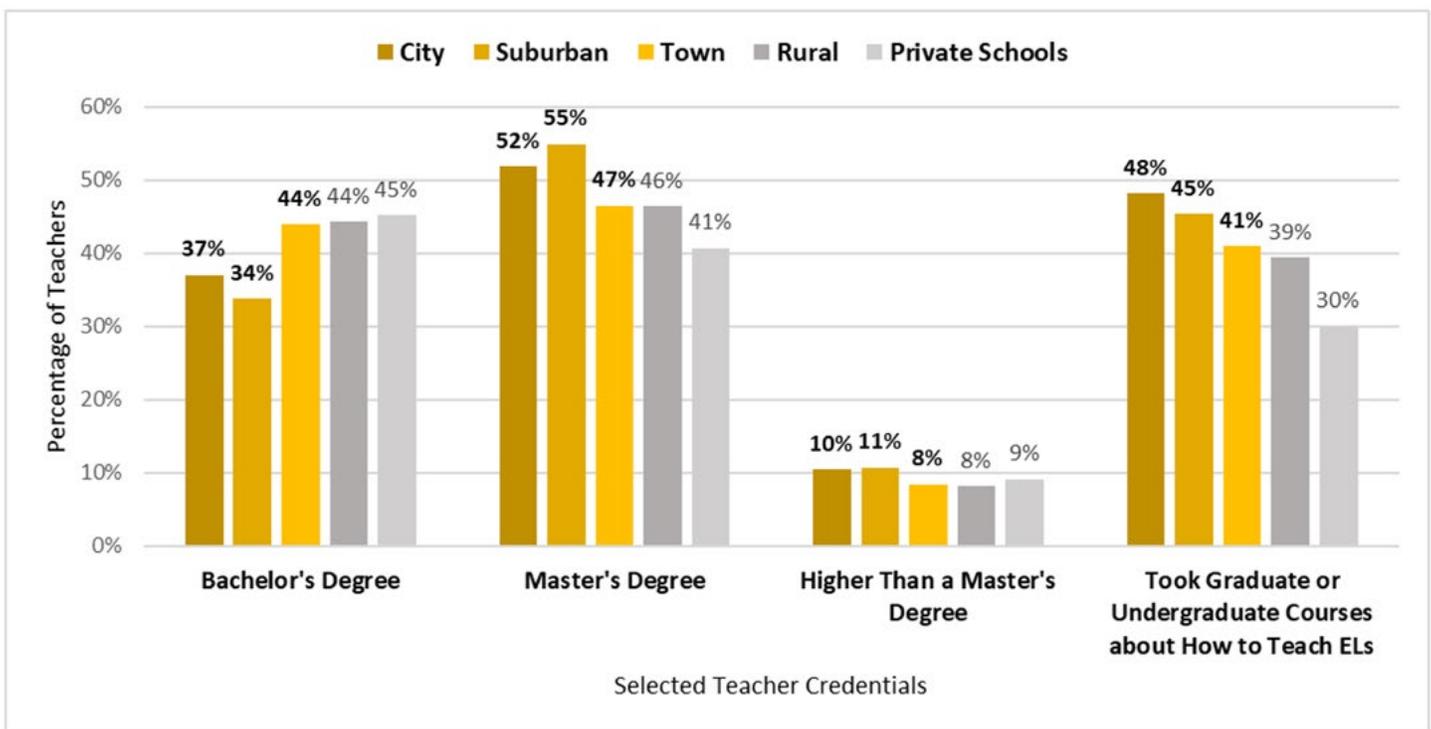
Many factors contribute to student achievement; great teachers do not necessarily have high credentials ([Gorman, 2007](#)). However, research does suggest that the educational credentials of teachers can predict effective teaching and teachers with more professional training can improve student academic performance ([Liu, 2021](#)). In fact, highly qualified teachers often refer to teachers who have a bachelor’s degree, have full state certification or licensure, and prove that they know each subject they teach ([GreatSchools, 2023](#)).

Urban students often have educators with higher academic degrees and special training in certain subject areas. Nationwide, 33% of adults 25 or older have bachelor’s degrees or higher; in cities and in suburban areas, the share is 37% respectively; in towns, 22%; in rural areas, 25% ([NCES, 2022](#)). Consistent with the data, students in city and suburban public schools are more likely to have teachers with higher educational attainment and professional trainings, compared with students in less urbanized areas and students in private schools.

Figure 9 shows that in the 2020-21 school year:

- More than half the teachers in city public schools (52%) and suburban public schools (55%) held master’s degrees.
- More than 1 in 10 teachers in city and suburban public schools had educational attainment higher than a master’s degree.
- More than 40% of urban K-12 public school teachers had taken undergraduate or graduate courses about how to teach ELs or students with limited English proficiency.

Figure 9. Percentage of K-12 School Teachers Who Had Certain Credentials, by School Type: School Year 2020-21



Source: *Characteristics of Public School Teachers* ([NCES, 2022](#)).

Many urban students attend schools where teachers have subject specialists or experts to support them, from pedagogy to technology. Fourth-grade students in more urbanized areas (cities and suburbs) were more likely to attend schools with literacy coaches who provide constant professional assistance to their reading teachers, according to the 2022 data collected by the National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](#)). Compared with rural students, urban students generally had more chances to learn from teachers who are proficient in technology and/or teachers with more professional development provided by their school or district personnel (Table 5).

For example, in 2022, for eighth graders:

- Nearly 3 in 4 urban students had teachers proficient in the use of the internet.
- At least 3 in 4 urban students attended schools where the district personnel provided teachers with professional development in how to use technology in classrooms.
- About 4 in 5 urban students attended schools with teachers who had professional development in teaching critical reading and writing skills provided by district personnel.

*Table 5. Percentage of Eighth-Grade Public School Students Whose Teachers Have Selected Proficiency/Training, by School Location: 2022*

| Teacher Is Proficient in ...   | City | Suburb | Town | Rural |
|--|------|--------|------|-------|
| <b>Integrating Computers into Instruction</b>  | 24   | 24     | 22   | 23    |
| <b>Software Applications</b>   | 36   | 35     | 35   | 34    |
| <b>Use of the Internet</b>   | 75   | 73     | 74   | 71    |
| <b>Teacher Has Professional Development Provided by School District Personnel in ...</b> |      |        |      |       |
| <b>Using Technology in Classroom</b>   | 75   | 85     | 74   | 62    |
| <b>Teaching Critical Reading and Writing Skills</b>                                      | 79   | 72     | 82   | 54    |
| <b>Social Studies Instruction</b>  | 67   | 67     | 46   | 44    |
| <b>General Teaching Practices</b>  | 91   | 83     | 94   | 75    |

Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](#)

Research suggests that the most common strategy for school districts to support teachers and staff is professional development ([Chu and Shen, 2022](#)). Among the 100 largest urban school districts in the country, more than 80% reported investing in professional development and equipping educators with valuable skills and knowledge ([Ward, 2022](#)). More than 80% of the districts planned to use federal aid to train teachers on topics such as evidence-based instructional approaches, family engagement strategies, and new technology platforms; more than 30% planned to use their funding on literacy-specific training, such as focusing on evidence-based practices associated with the science of reading ([Jordan and Dimarco, 2022](#)).

## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 3: How Urban Districts Support High-Quality Teachers

### Teacher of the Year Program in Lancaster Independent School District (Texas)

In [Lancaster Independent School District](#) (ISD), most students are Black (76%) and Hispanic (20%). As of the 2021-22 school year, the district had 6,978 students. Nearly 70% of students were considered at risk of dropping out of school. Nearly 10% of students were enrolled in bilingual and English language learning programs ([The Texas Tribune, n.d.](#)).

Against the odds, the district received an accountability rating of B for the 2021-22 school year in the Texas state education rating system. In the class of 2021, 99.2% of students received their high school diplomas on time or earlier. The dropout rate for students in grades 9-12 was 0.1% during the 2020-21 school year. One key factor in the great success of students in this district are teachers.

“As of the 2021-22 school year, an average teacher’s salary was \$60,345, which is \$1,458 more than the state average. On average, teachers had 12 years of experience” ([The Texas Tribune, n.d.](#)). High teacher salary is not the only way to attract and retain high-quality teachers. The Lancaster ISD has a program, Teacher of the Year, to reward and encourage teachers to go above and beyond.

According to the program, the Lancaster ISD is looking for teachers with the following characteristics:

- Care for all learners; engage and inspire every student.
- Be capable and willing to work cooperatively with colleagues and different groups in the community.
- Actively transform instruction and engage all learners, such as implementing innovative, creative ideas and using the most current technology resources.
- Always learn current educational trends and practices and try to incorporate what is learned into the classroom.
- “Demonstrate and inspire great teaching which is key to deep learning!”

Kimberly Ballard was the 2021-22 Elementary Teacher of the Year. An art teacher, Ballard focuses on bridging the gap between core subjects and fine arts. She has implemented math and science into her art lessons and serves as a campus mentor for new art teachers in the Lancaster ISD. As a certified arts integration specialist, she introduced a program that combined coding with art. She always finds creative ways to challenge students to build their critical thinking skills. She uplifts the students and brings smiles to their faces when they see their art displayed in school.

## **Educator Professional Development: District Strategic Plan in Bellwood School District 88 (Illinois)**

The [Bellwood School District 88](#) serves 2,000 students from prekindergarten to eighth grade in the western suburbs of Chicago. In 2022, nearly half the teachers (47%) in the [district](#) were non-White, including 31% Black and 13% Hispanic.

In 2018, the school board approved the district's [Strategic Plan for FY2019-2023](#). The plan set the following goals and actions for educator professional development:

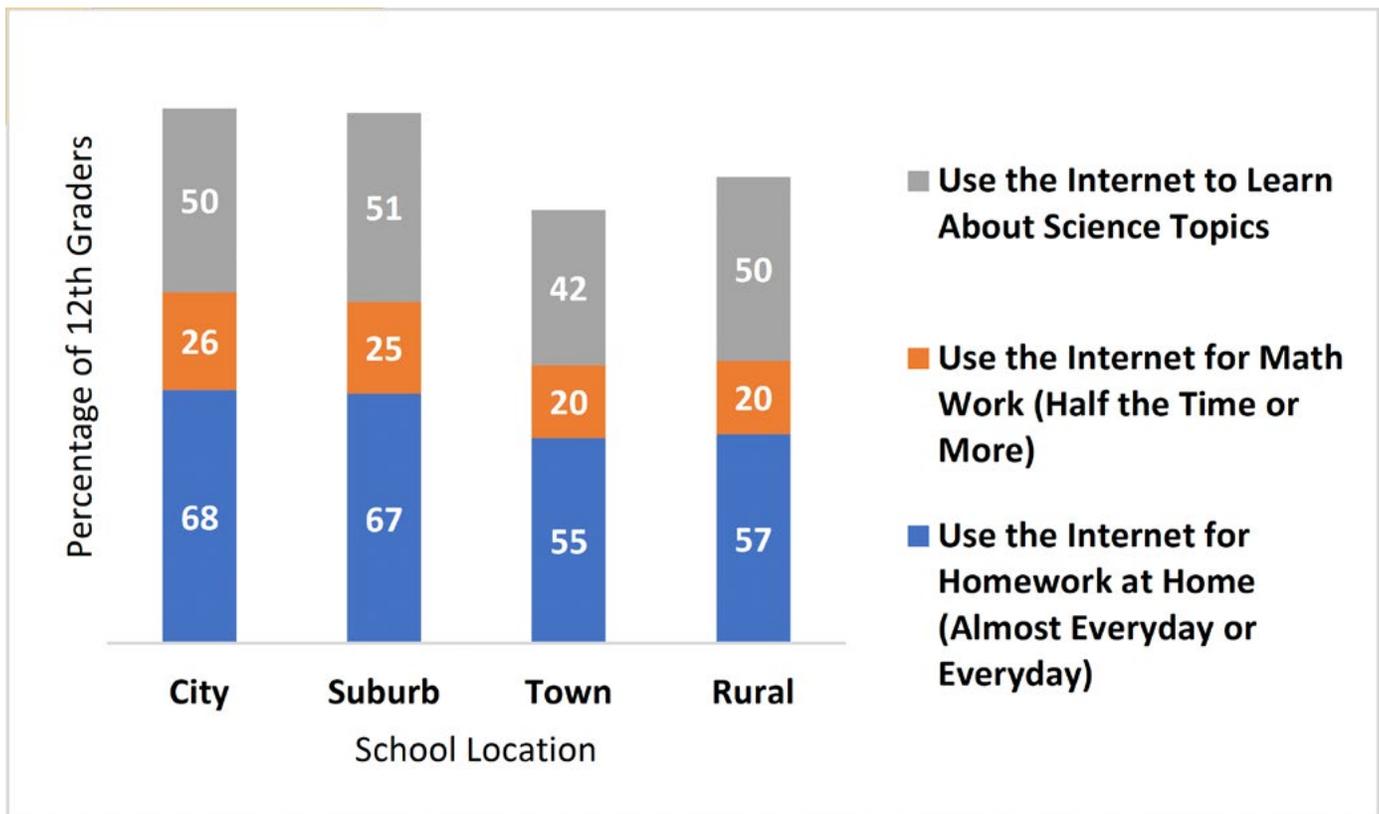
- Provide teachers and administrators with professional development opportunities that will enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and effectiveness.
- Provide meaningful and targeted professional development opportunities for teachers during the monthly, board-approved Half School Improvement Day. The goal is to increase their instructional skills.
- Provide student achievement data training (i.e., [NWEA/MAP](#)) for building-level administrators and teachers, who are to utilize all reports to guide instructional delivery, practice, and interventions.

Given the important contribution that high-quality teachers make to student achievement, many school districts around the country are implementing programs geared toward the professional development of teachers. Bellwood SD 88 is a good example for district leaders to look ahead and think forward.

## 7. Urban students have more access to learning in the digital age.

In general, students in cities and suburban areas are more likely to use the internet to do homework and to learn math and science, compared with students in towns and rural areas (Figure 10). One important reason is a higher level of broadband availability in urban areas, compared with less urbanized and rural areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, internet access at home became essential for students to continue their education. About half the students in cities (50%) and suburban areas (49%) reported having internet access at home in [August 2022](#). In contrast, about two-thirds of the students in towns (64%) and rural areas (65%) had to use the internet at locations other than home.

Figure 10. Percentage of 12th-Grade Students, by Using the Internet to Learn Math and Science and Do Homework at Home: 2019



Source: NCES High School Transcript Study (HSTS), 2019 Mathematics Assessment.

Compared with communities in less urbanized and rural areas, urban communities have fewer challenges when it comes to broadband availability ([CPE, 2022](#)). In 2021, in states with high broadband availability in both rural and urban areas (e.g., [Connecticut](#)), most schools had their teachers communicate with students online every day (e.g., through email, Google Classroom, Zoom), conduct virtual office hours every day, and use virtual tools (e.g., online forums, discussion boards, professional communities) to prepare teaching (Table 6). By contrast, in states where broadband availability is a big challenge, particularly in less urbanized and rural areas (e.g., [Alaska](#), [Georgia](#)), fewer students had opportunities to learn from their teachers when schools were closed during COVID-19.

Table 6. Percentage of Schools (in the NAEP Fourth-Grade Assessment), by Survey Items About Teachers and Students Using Online Tools During the Pandemic-Caused School Closures, by State and School Locale: 2021

|                | Teachers Communicate With Students Online Everyday |        |      |       | Teachers Conduct Virtual Office Hours Everyday |        |      |       | Teachers Use Virtual Tools to Share Knowledge With Peers and Prepare Instruction |        |      |       |
|----------------|--|--------|------|-------|--|--------|------|-------|--|--------|------|-------|
|                | City   | Suburb | Town | Rural | City   | Suburb | Town | Rural | City   | Suburb | Town | Rural |
| Alabama        | 95   | 64     | 29   | 62    | 91   | 46     | 56   | 45    | 100  | 100    | 81   | 86    |
| Alaska         | 94   | #      | 68   | 40    | 36   | #      | 45   | 38    | 89!  | 100!   | 83!  | 79!   |
| Arizona        | 100  | 85     | 100  | 77    | 86   | 63     | #    | 94    | 89!  | 100!   | #    | 93!   |
| Arkansas       | 48   | 64     | 84   | 59    | 42   | 14     | 75   | 35    | 100  | 72     | 85   | 90    |
| Connecticut    | 100  | 82     | 100  | 100   | 74   | 53     | 100  | 62    | 92   | 96     | 100  | 72    |
| Georgia        | 100  | 91     | 100  | 55    | 78   | 84     | 100  | 48    | 100  | 90     | 100  | 90    |
| Idaho          | 57   | 66     | 31   | 39    | 61   | 66     | 15   | 36    | 79!  | 89!    | 84!  | 100!  |
| Illinois       | 100  | 100    | 100  | 84    | 92   | 86     | 100  | 53    | 93   | 100    | 100  | 82    |
| Indiana        | 74   | 81     | 100  | 81    | 32   | 81     | 56   | 81    | 100!   | 100!   | 100! | 80!   |
| Kansas         | 83   | 93     | 80   | 80    | 74   | 93     | 69   | 44    | 100  | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| Kentucky       | 100  | 100    | 100  | 92    | 100  | 87     | 87   | 81    | 85   | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| Louisiana      | 100  | 100    | 67   | 60    | 81   | 100    | 50   | 43    | 78!  | 100!   | 50!  | 77!   |
| Maine          | 86   | 56     | 100  | 74    | 53   | 46     | 41   | 40    | 76   | 90     | 54   | 85    |
| Maryland       | 100  | 100    | #    | 100   | 68   | 73     | #    | 89    | 98   | 93     | #    | 100   |
| Mississippi    | 100  | 100    | 61   | 61    | 80   | 90     | 57   | 57    | 100!   | 100!   | 93!  | 83!   |
| Missouri       | 87   | 72     | 29   | 46    | 78   | 76     | 34   | 31    | 63   | 100    | 85   | 73    |
| New Jersey     | 100  | 100    | #    | 100   | 76   | 83     | #    | 100   | 68   | 84     | #    | 100   |
| North Carolina | 89   | 71     | 68   | 90    | 90   | 69     | 68   | 56    | 90!  | 100!   | 100! | 92!   |
| North Dakota   | 84   | 25     | 76   | 69    | 57   | #      | 58   | 48    | 87!  | 100!   | 89!  | 91!   |
| Ohio           | 100  | 87     | 46   | 54    | 38   | 61     | 46   | 20    | 100!   | 87!    | 67!  | 83!   |
| Pennsylvania   | 100  | 95     | 100  | 92    | 70   | 65     | 18   | 81    | 100!   | 92!    | 100! | 94!   |
| Rhode Island   | 93   | 100    | #    | 59    | 73   | 75     | #    | 18    | 100  | 100    | #    | 59    |
| South Dakota   | 25   | #      | 23   | 24    | 9  | #      | 14   | 23    | 92   | 100    | 80   | 80    |
| Texas          | 88   | 62     | 18   | 100   | 75   | 58     | 56   | 100   | 100  | 95     | 64   | 100   |
| Utah           | 100  | 62     | 54   | 57    | 100  | 31     | 54   | 43    | 37!  | 90!    | 100! | 100!  |
| Virginia       | 83   | 71     | 100  | 55    | 59   | 43     | 100  | 50    | 100  | 100    | #    | 71    |
| Wyoming        | 25   | #      | 25   | 45    | 8  | #      | 13   | 26    | 90   | 100    | 100  | 90    |

Color Coding:  >80%       >70%       >90%

Note: # Rounds to zero. ! Nonresponse for this variable was greater than 15% but not greater than 50%.

Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

It’s important to address several nuances when referring to characteristics of urban students. Technically, urban refers to all non-rural areas, but reporting data using a dichotomy can be a myth. Therefore, we present data of schools in cities, suburban areas, and towns to help readers to see some commonly shared patterns as well as some unique trends for each urban subtype. Also, it will serve readers well to be cautious when comparing urban and rural students, as they, particularly students attending schools in towns, also share some common strength and challenges with their rural peers. The seven characteristics we present here are but a snapshot of urban students who have rich cultural backgrounds and different learning conditions.

## Part II: Five Equity Issues That Challenge Urban School Districts

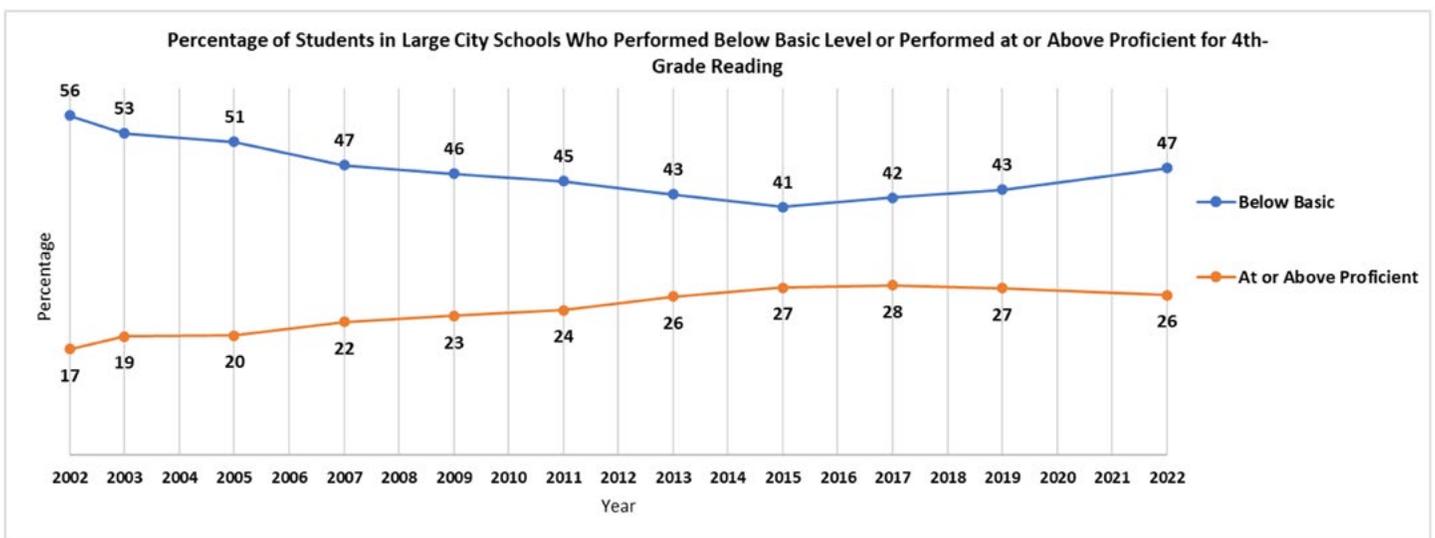
Equity means that “every child — regardless of where they come from, what they look like, who their parents are, what their temperament is, or what they show up knowing or not knowing — gets what they need every day in our schools to develop the knowledge and skills to be ready for college or a career” (Aguilar, 2013). Many urban students come from low-income families, new immigrant households, and other disadvantaged backgrounds, as we described in Part I. Their parents have high expectations and depend on public schools for their education.

### Why we need to address equity challenges

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, has shown discouraging results for urban schools, particularly in large cities and towns. For two decades, students in large cities have made minimal progress in academic achievement (Figure 11). In 2022, there were still 47% of students in large cities who failed to reach the NAEP basic level for fourth-grade reading, while only 26% performed at or above proficient. Why is fourth-grade reading so important?

- [Research](#) shows that children who struggle to read in first grade are 88% more likely to struggle in grade four; and those who struggle in fourth grade are four times more likely to drop out of school.
- Data reveals that 85% of juveniles who interact with the court system are functionally illiterate, and 60% of the nation’s prison inmates are illiterate (Walker, 2021).
- “While it is an urban myth that prisons base some of their future planning on third- and fourth-grade literacy rates, the data is compelling that there is a strong connection between early low literacy skills and incarceration rates” (Walker, 2021).

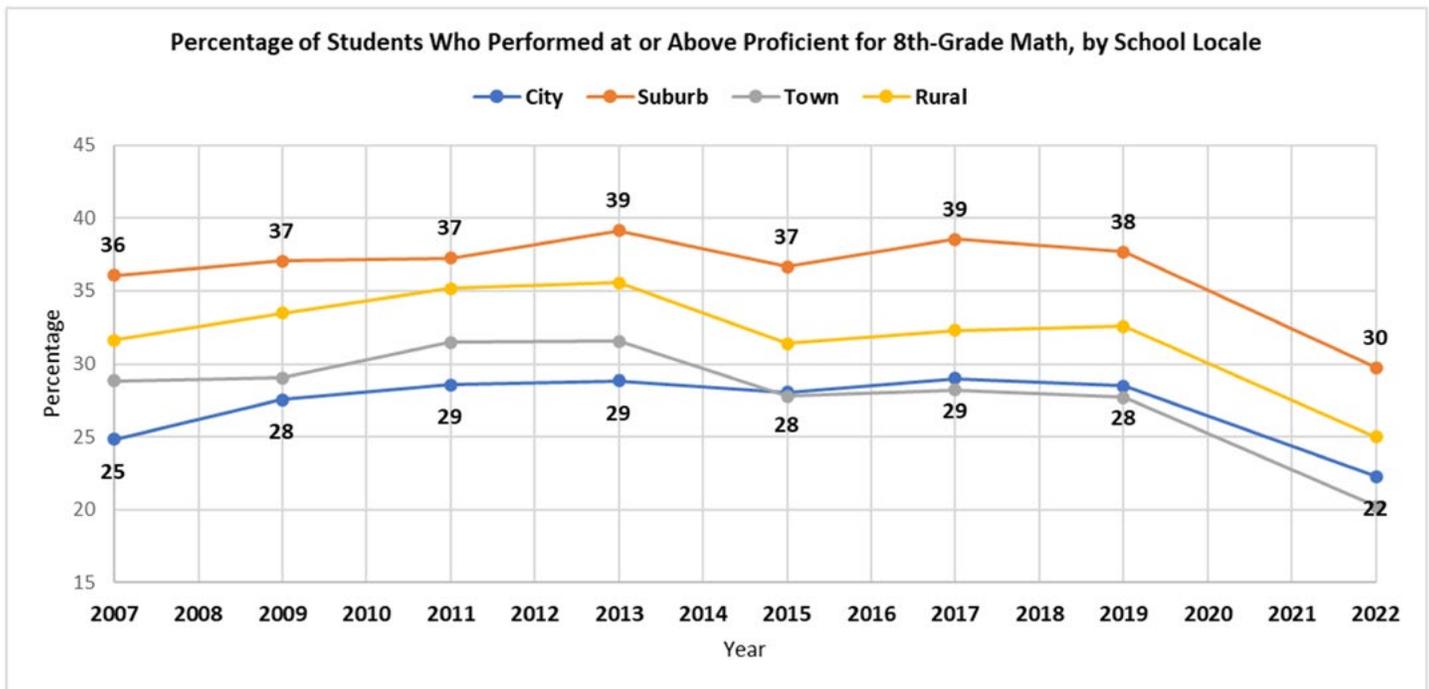
Figure 11. Percentage of Students in Large Cities Who Performed Below Basic or Performed at or Above Proficient for Fourth-Grade Reading: NAEP 2002-2022



Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

As for eighth-grade math, students in cities and towns have performed poorly for more than a decade (Figure 12). In 2022, only 20% of eighth graders in towns and 22% in cities performed at or above proficient. While suburban students have performed better than their peers in other school locales, still, at least 3 in 5 students could not reach the proficient level for eighth-grade math. The U.S. National Science Board (2022) concludes that “Long-standing disparities persist in student science and math scores across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. These disparities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Figure 12. Percentage of Students Who Performed at or Above Proficient for Eighth-Grade Math, by School Locale: NAEP 2007 -2022



Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

For decades, school leaders and educators have made great efforts to help students to complete K-12 education, including increasing graduation rates and raising the graduation bar. The overall dropout rate for 16- to 24-year-olds decreased from 8.3% in 2010 to 5.2% in 2021 (NCES, 2023). During this time, the dropout rate declined substantially among Hispanic (from 16.7% to 7.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (from 15.4% to 10.2%), and Black (from 10.3% to 5.9%) students.

Despite the progress, increasing graduation rates, particularly of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, is still a priority for all school leaders. Table 7 shows that in the 2019-20 school year, 22% of Black students and 22% of Hispanic students in city schools did not graduate from high school. The graduation rates in cities for Native American students, students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students were way below the U.S. average graduation rate.

Table 7. Public High School 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR), by Selected Student Characteristics and Locale (Urban): 2019-20

| Locale      | Total     | Race/ethnicity |           |           |                        |                               | Students with disabilities | English learner | Economically disadvantaged |
|-------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
|             |           | White          | Black     | Hispanic  | Asian/Pacific Islander | American Indian/Alaska Native |                            |                 |                            |
| <b>U.S.</b> | <b>87</b> | <b>90</b>      | <b>81</b> | <b>83</b> | <b>93</b>              | <b>75</b>                     | <b>71</b>                  | <b>71</b>       | <b>81</b>                  |
| City        | 82        | 86             | 78        | 78        | 92                     | 64                            | 65                         | 68              | 77                         |
| Large       | 79        | 84             | 76        | 77        | 92                     | 61                            | 63                         | 67              | 76                         |
| Midsize     | 81        | 85             | 79        | 77        | 92                     | 64                            | 65                         | 67              | 77                         |
| Small       | 86        | 89             | 82        | 82        | 93                     | 72                            | 69                         | 73              | 80                         |
| Suburban    | 89        | 92             | 84        | 83        | 95                     | 79                            | 74                         | 72              | 83                         |
| Large       | 89        | 92             | 84        | 83        | 95                     | 81                            | 74                         | 72              | 82                         |
| Midsize     | 89        | 91             | 85        | 86        | 94                     | 80                            | 74                         | 77              | 84                         |
| Small       | 88        | 90             | 83        | 85        | 95                     | 68                            | 70                         | 76              | 82                         |
| Town        | 87        | 89             | 84        | 83        | 91                     | 77                            | 72                         | 75              | 83                         |
| Fringe      | 88        | 90             | 85        | 85        | 91                     | 79                            | 73                         | 75              | 83                         |
| Distant     | 88        | 89             | 85        | 84        | 92                     | 82                            | 71                         | 74              | 83                         |
| Remote      | 85        | 88             | 82        | 81        | 90                     | 74                            | 71                         | 76              | 81                         |

Note: The green color bar reflects the comparison between each locale and U.S., meaning the percentage points higher than the U.S. statistics in each column. Source: [Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate \(ACGR\), by selected student characteristics and locale: 2019-20](#)

In general, providing every student with high-quality education requires schools to have adequate funding, high-level curricula, effective educators, a safe and supportive school culture, and parental engagement and meaningful community support. In this section, we focus on data in these five areas. (Figure 13). We also share some examples of urban school districts tackling issues related to budget, curriculum, teacher shortage, and community engagement.



Figure 13. Five Areas for Educational Equity



Source: [cpe-educational-equity-research-brief-january-2016.pdf](https://www.cpe.org/education-equity-research-brief-january-2016.pdf) (nsba.org)

## 1. Funding

Does spending more on education improve academic achievement? This question has been debated for decades. Some researchers state, “Instead of simply increasing funding for public education, federal and state policymakers should implement education reforms designed to improve resource allocation and boost student performance” ([Lips and Walkins, 2008](#)). Some researchers suggest that increased spending on education can improve student outcomes, especially among low-income students ([Barnum 2019](#); [Jackson, 2017](#); [Jackson and Mackevicius, 2021](#)).

From the perspective of urban school leaders, obtaining adequate funding is vital to provide excellent education and digital equity ([Garrett, 2023](#)). “It is crucial that school districts focus on finding sustainable funding sources through grants and other programs to guarantee that educational and digital equity goals are achieved in an effective and long-term manner,” says a school board president of an urban [district](#) with high percentage of minority students from low-income families (51% Black, 35% Hispanic).

### Title I funding and services

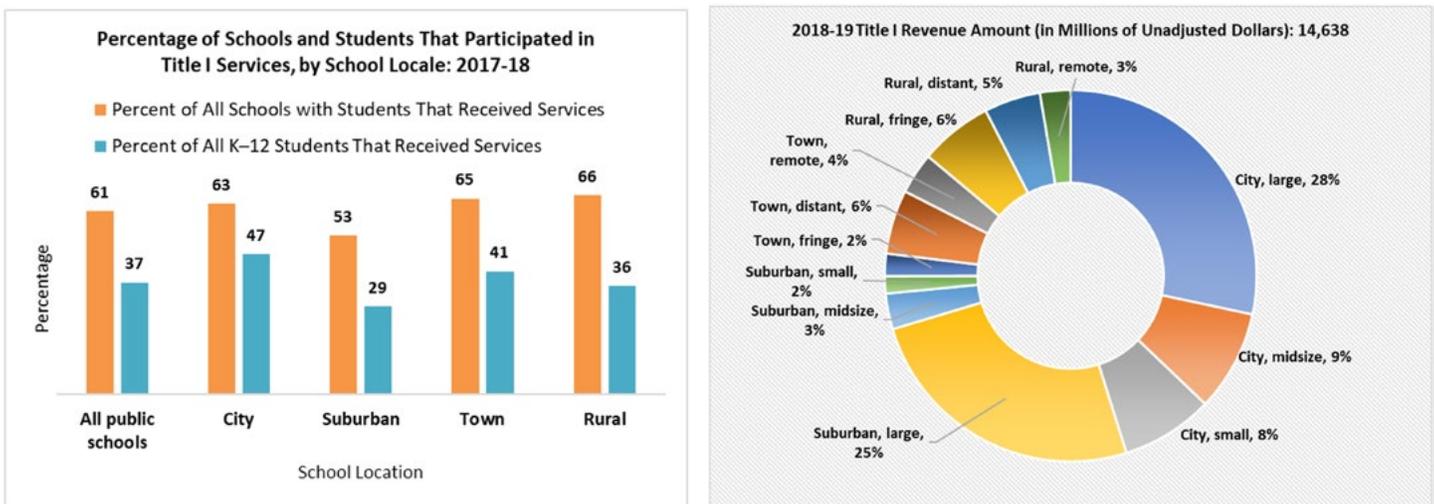
Title I is a federal grants program that provides money to school districts or local education agencies (LEAs). According to the U.S. Department of Education ([ED, 2023](#)), Title I is supplemental education funding to support communities of concentrated poverty; the Title I program serves an estimated 25 million students in nearly 90% of school districts and nearly 60% of all public schools. The funds are to be spent on local programs that provide extra academic support to help students in high-poverty schools meet challenging state academic standards.

The total Title I allocations per formula-eligible child vary among the [12 NCES geographic locales](#), which are based on a district’s population and proximity to an urbanized area. “The locales with the highest total Title I final allocations per formula-eligible child are the most densely and least densely populated areas” (NCES, n.d.). In 2015, each formula-eligible child received the most Title I funds in large cities (\$1,466) and remote rural areas (\$1,313). In contrast, a formula-eligible child received less Title I money in districts located in fringe rural areas (\$1,070), fringe towns (\$1,088), and small suburban areas (\$1,102), compared with their peers in other school locations.

For FY 2023, the federal government requested \$36.5 billion for Title I Budget Amount, which more than doubles the program’s funding compared to the 2021 enacted level. The Education Department also proposed to reserve \$100 million for direct grants to states to implement voluntary School Funding Equity Commissions and to LEAs to implement voluntary resource equity reviews. “LEAs can use Title I funds flexibly for locally determined programs and interventions across a broad range of areas, including through schoolwide programs that allow federal and other funds to be consolidated and leveraged for comprehensive school reforms” (ED, 2023).

With such increases in Title I funding, district leaders need to understand how every disadvantaged student can benefit from the money and how districts can get the biggest bang for the education buck. Figure 14 shows that in 2017-18, in cities and towns, more than 60% of schools and more than 40% of students received Title I funds. The funded services include remedial reading or remedial math programs for children who live in areas with high concentrations of low-income families. In 2018-19, more than a quarter of Title I money went to K-12 public schools in large cities (28%, about \$4.2 billion), and a quarter to large suburban schools (about \$3.7 billion).

Figure 14. Distribution of Title I Revenue and Services, by School Locale: 2017-18 and 2018-19



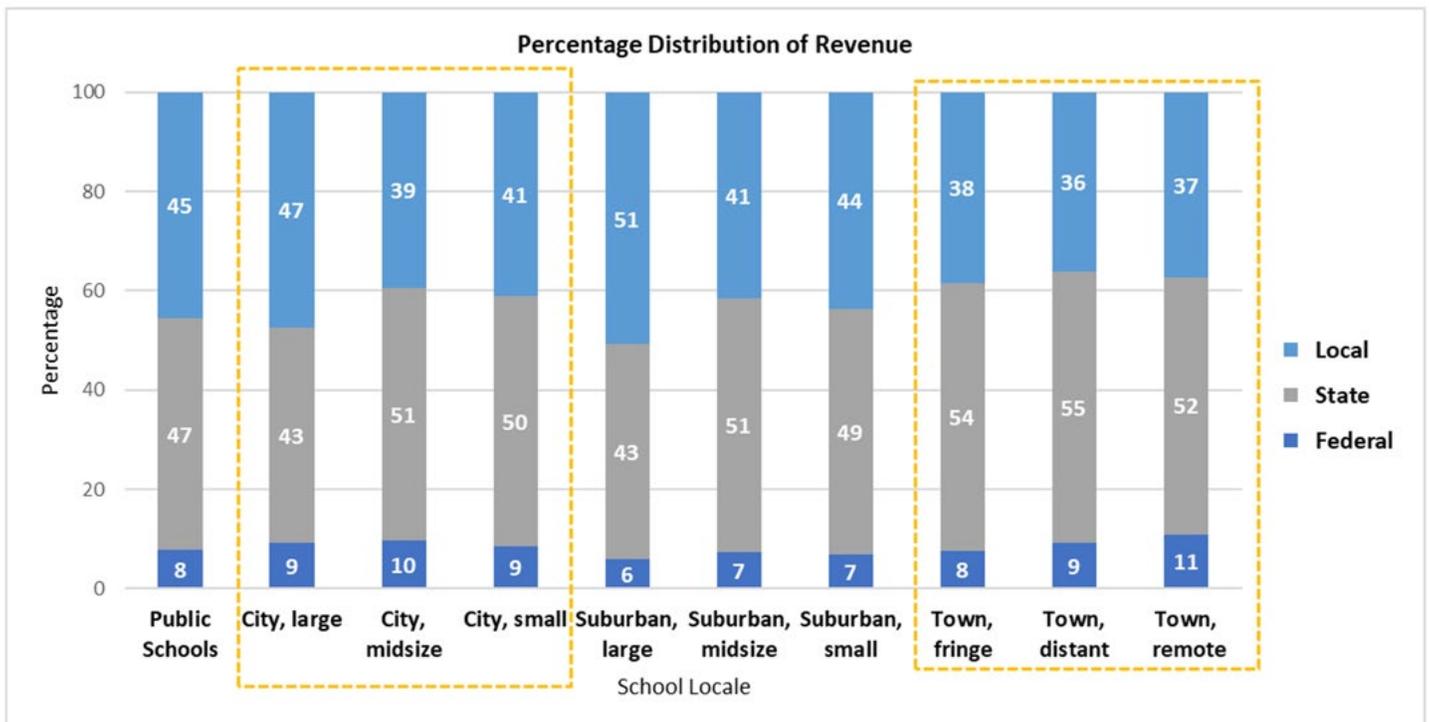
Source: NCES [Table 235.40](#) prepared in 2022 and [NTPS data](#).

## School revenue sources

School districts receive revenues from three sources — federal, state, and local. The federal government funds schools through programs such as Title I, Child Nutrition Act, and Children with Disabilities (IDEA). State and local governments provide most of the funding for K-12 education — 92% of all school funding (Figure 15). “State governments rely on formulas that distribute education funds among school districts. Those school districts use state dollars and additional revenue raised from federal and local sources to fund individual schools” (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2022).

- Schools in midsize cities (10%) and remote towns (11%) received a little more from the federal government, compared with schools in other urban locations.
- More than half the funding for schools in midsize and small cities, midsize suburban areas, and towns came from state governments.
- Schools in large suburban areas depended more on local revenues, compared with schools in other urban locations. More than half of their funding came from local sources.

Figure 15. Percentage of Public-School Revenue, by Federal, State, and Local, and by School Locale: 2018-19



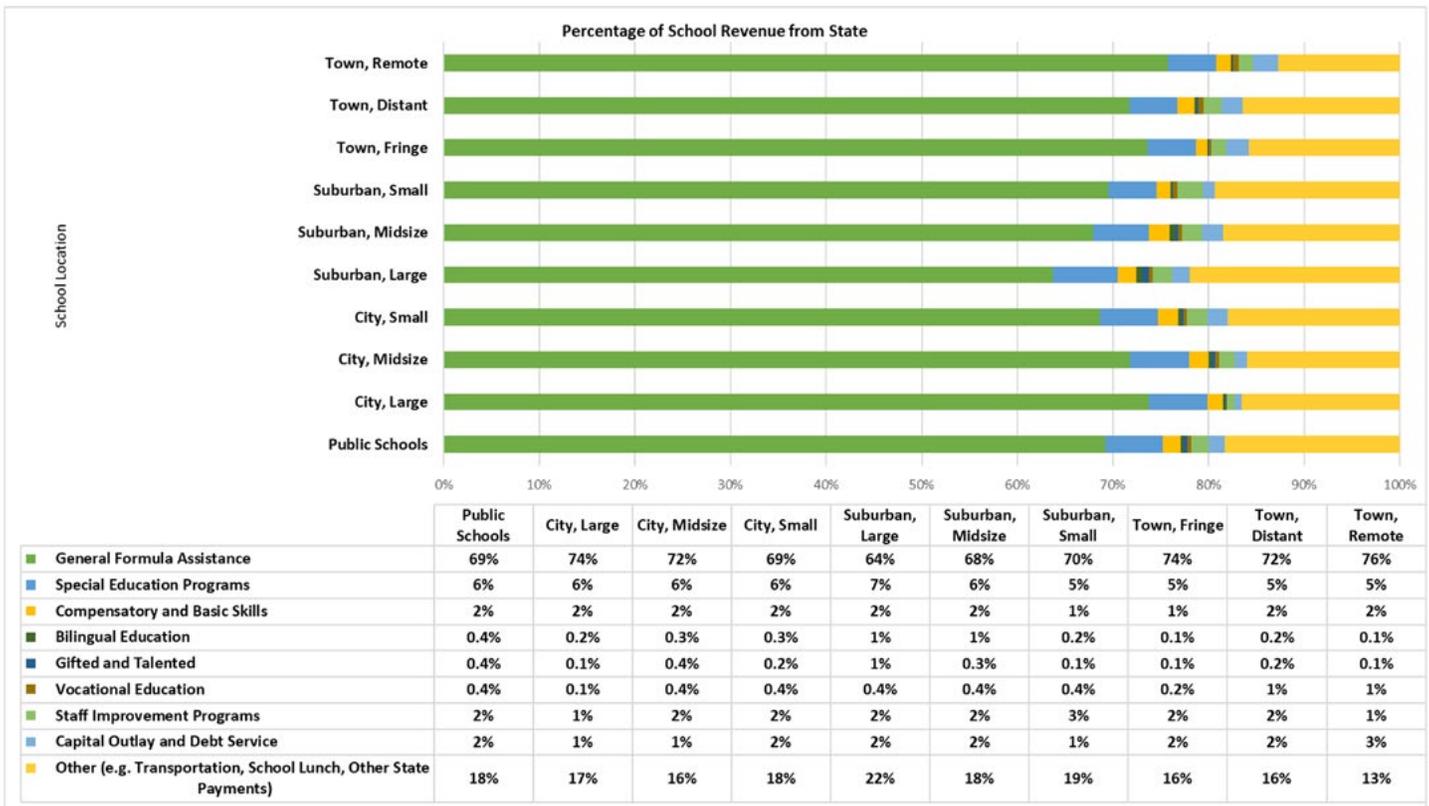
Source: NCES Table 235.40 prepared in 2022.

Figure 16 shows how states provide funds to schools. About 70% of state funds are based on state formulas. “States use formulas that aim, at least in part, to equitably distribute education funding across school districts” (Peter G. Peterson Foundation, 2022). State formulas account for locally raised revenues and the needs of students in each district. As a result, the state’s share of education funding tends to be higher in school districts with a low capacity to raise revenues. As shown in Figure 16, in the 2018-19 school year:

- On average, schools received relatively higher state formula funding in large cities (74%), fringe towns (74%), and remote towns (76%), compared with schools in other urban locations.
- Schools in large suburban areas (7%) received a little more state funding for students with disabilities, compared with schools in other urban locations. By contrast, schools in towns received less state funding for students with disabilities (5%).
- Less than 1% of school funds provided by state governments were for bilingual education, gifted and talented programs, or vocational education.

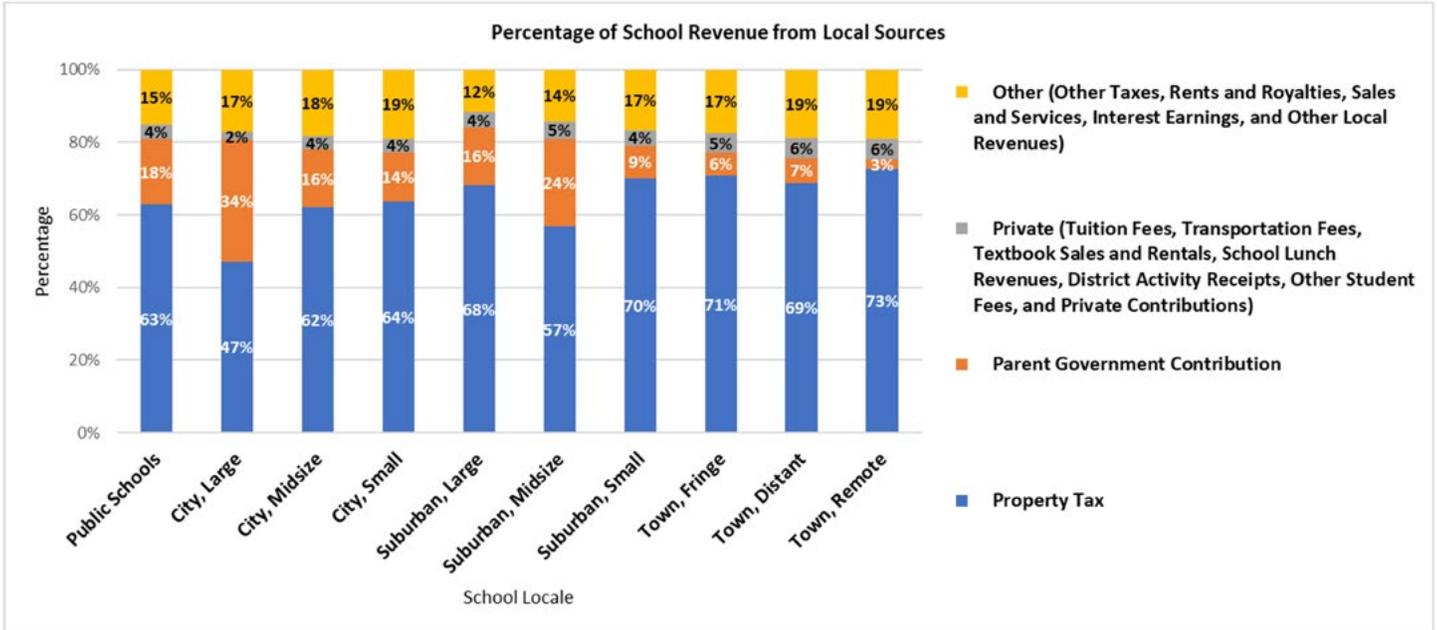
School revenues from local sources are basically from property taxes and parent government (e.g., city/county government) contributions (Figure 17). School districts in large cities received 47% of local revenues from property tax and 34% from parent government contribution, which shows a different pattern from schools in other urban locations. Schools in towns and small suburban areas depended more on property tax, as about 70% of their local revenues came from property tax and less than 10% from their parent government contribution.

Figure 16. Percentage of School Revenue from State, by Function and School Locale: 2018-19



Source: NCES Table 235.40 prepared in 2022.

Figure 17. Percentage of School Revenue from Local, by Sources and School Locale: 2018-19



Source: NCES [Table 235.40](#) prepared in 2022.



## Funding challenges that urban school boards may face

The principal responsibility of school boards is to deliver a well-rounded education to district students, and for this purpose, school boards should manage district financial resources wisely ([Colorado Association of School Boards, 2022](#)). “While the superintendent is responsible for managing the day-to-day finances of their school corporation, school board members must be accountable to ensure the financial solvency of the school corporation for which they serve” ([Indiana School Boards Association, 2019](#)). Based on the data we examined, urban school leaders may want to consider the following contexts when reviewing school budgets and advocating for their students:

- Student enrollment decline can affect school revenues from federal and state governments. Between 2015 and 2021, suburban school enrollment decreased by 4% (1 million students); in cities, enrollment also decreased by 4% (more than half a million students); in towns, enrollment decreased by 6% (about 0.3 million students) (Figure 1).
- The primary element in Title I and state general formulas is the number of children 5-17 that come from families below the poverty level that reside in a school district (LEA). Data show that such a population has been spreading over schools across the country. For instance, in suburban districts, the number of students attending mid-high-poverty schools has increased by about 217,000 students; in districts located in towns, the number of students attending high-poverty schools has increased by about 75,000 students (Figure 7).
- “From its inception in 1974, IDEA authorized federal funding for up to 40% of average per-pupil spending nationwide to pay a portion of what it costs to provide special education services for students with disabilities. Yet, in the more than four decades since the law was originally enacted, federal funding has never reached this target” ([Kolbe et al., 2022](#)). While Congress approved a 20% increase in appropriations for IDEA in FY2023, schools still cannot meet the need of all students with disabilities ([The National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2022](#)). Schools in towns only received 5% of the state allocated money for special education (Figure 16).
- The EL student population has been increasing from suburban schools to schools in remote towns (Figure 5). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds need bilingual education, gifted and talented programs, and vocational training ([Aldrich, 2019](#); [Alpert, 2015](#); [Sophinos, 2022](#)). Yet, state governments generally invested inadequately for schools to develop these educational programs.
- In towns and small suburban areas, a large portion of school revenues from local sources comes from property tax. The property tax is a stable tax relative to the sales tax and income tax when the economy falls into a recession, but state governments often cut aid to schools in recessions to balance their budgets, since they rely predominantly on sales and income taxes ([Kenyon et al., 2022](#)). Currently, schools are facing inflation pressures. According to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), in June 2022, the 12-month increase in overall prices was 9.1%; over the year ended June 2023, consumer prices increased 3%.

“Iowa’s largest school district, which starts its new school year on Aug. 24, is shelling out double last year’s cost for fuel. An Oregon district is putting off a paving project for a year after costs ballooned far beyond what the district’s voters had approved the district to spend. Many districts, within weeks of opening their doors for the school year, are raising fees for school meals to account for dramatic increases in the cost of bread, meat, cheese, and milk.

With fixed budgets complicated by local, state, and federal funding that rolls out on different schedules, school districts often struggle to adjust to unexpected costs. Some can shift funds around or tap into savings without much issue, but others find themselves experiencing a deficit, laying off staff, or canceling vital investments in teaching and learning to stay afloat” ([Education Week, 2022](#)).

## Policy/Practice Box 4. How Urban School Districts Cope with Inflation and Inequitable Funding

### Bond Program Implementation in ABC Unified School District (California)

The ABC Unified School District is a large suburban school district in Los Angeles County, California. The district has more than 18,000 students (45% Hispanic, 35% Asian, 8% Black, 6% two or more races, 5% White, and 1% Hawaiian). Nearly 41% of ABC students are from low-income families, eligible for free and reduced-price lunch program; about 24% are English learners (ELs).

As a high-achieving school district, most of its students performed proficient in reading and math (*U.S. News*, n.d.). That said, the district has challenges when it comes to school revenues. In 2019, district leaders considered a situation in which bond dollars were projected to lose 4% of their value annually. They proposed the following mitigation strategies:

- Seek state matching funds, grants, and partnership with other agencies.
- Consider setting aside additional funds to support the bond program.
- Utilize interest earned on bond funds to offset a portion of escalation.
- Accelerate the sale of bonds to reduce the impact of escalation.

Currently, the district's revenue sources are 7% from federal, 73% from state, and 21% from local. This year, two schools in the district were awarded the National Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education for their students' high academic achievement. "The National Blue Ribbon Schools award affirms the hard work of educators, families, and communities in creating school environments where students are challenged and engaged" (ABC, 2023).

### Advocating Equitable Funding for Indianapolis Public Schools (Indiana)

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) is a large city district with 54 schools and 22,928 students (*U.S. News*, n.d.). The district's minority enrollment is 80%, including 40% Black students and 32% Hispanic students. Most students are from low-income families. According to IPS (Black, 2021), the district needs \$500 million each year to operate its schools; "50% of the district's budget comes from the state, and around 15% is federal funding, leaving about 35% that comes from local property taxes."



- Federal funding covers areas including Title I programs, food services, special education, and English Learners (ELs).
- Local funding includes central services and operations support such as facilities and transportation.
- State funding includes teacher salaries, special programs such as career and technical education (CTE) and special-needs programming and staff.

The state funding, also called State Tuition Support, consists of two pots of money – foundation funds and the complexity funds. The complexity funds are based on the needs of the students in each district. With more than 65% of students reported as economically disadvantaged, the district heavily depends on the Complexity Funds. Since the 2013-14 school year, Indiana lawmakers have consistently shifted how they fund schools, but IPS has not seen any increase in its state funding. The district leaders have been facing budget challenges year after year (Black, 2021).

To convince lawmakers to change the state funding formula, the district leadership team presented data showing that within IPS, schools receiving lower complexity dollars had some of the highest numbers of EL students, who often require more resources. The IPS chief financial officer said, “IPS data demonstrates high academic needs in schools with high EL populations.” The district developed a weighted system to allocate more funding for EL students, such as providing additional counselors, alternative resources for students and families who are new to the country.

Due to the disruption created by the pandemic and the decline in enrollment, IPS did need to make budget cuts. To ensure classroom instruction, the district decided to cut transportation costs. The district recommended the transition of selected high school students who meet board-approved eligibility criteria from yellow bus service to IndyGo, “the largest public transportation provider in the state of Indiana.” The other cost reduction came from enforcing existing walk zones at all schools. These two proposals saved the district more than \$3 million annually.

“By making strategic decisions now about how IPS spends money based on current projections in federal, state, and local funding, IPS can avoid having to make dramatic cuts later, like layoffs and cuts in pay the district worked so hard to increase. However, receiving more complexity dollars would help IPS keep pace with surrounding districts, increasing the ability to attract and retain teachers, school leaders, and materials to support the needs of high-needs students” (Black, 2021).

## 2. High-level curriculum

“Curriculum is the heart of the solution to educational inequities because it is a container for so much that happens during each school day” (Hartl and Riley, 2021). Nine in 10 American adults (88%) agree that the arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education (Cohen, 2016); 84% of Americans believe arts and STEM subjects (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math) complement each other well (Ipsos, 2019). However, many disadvantaged students attend schools without a curriculum in arts, that lack equal access to STEM courses, or that need to create more opportunities for students to earn credits in the fields they want to explore.

### Arts education

The Nation’s Report Card (i.e., NAEP) includes arts assessment that measures students’ knowledge and skills in the arts by asking them to observe, describe, analyze, and evaluate works of music and visual arts and to create original works of visual arts. The most recent arts assessment was given in 2016 to eighth-grade students. Table 8 shows that on average, Black and Hispanic students in urban schools scored much lower in music and visual arts, compared with their White and Asian peers.

Table 8. Average Scale Scores for Eighth-Grade Music/Visual Arts, by Student Race/Ethnicity and by School Locale: 2016

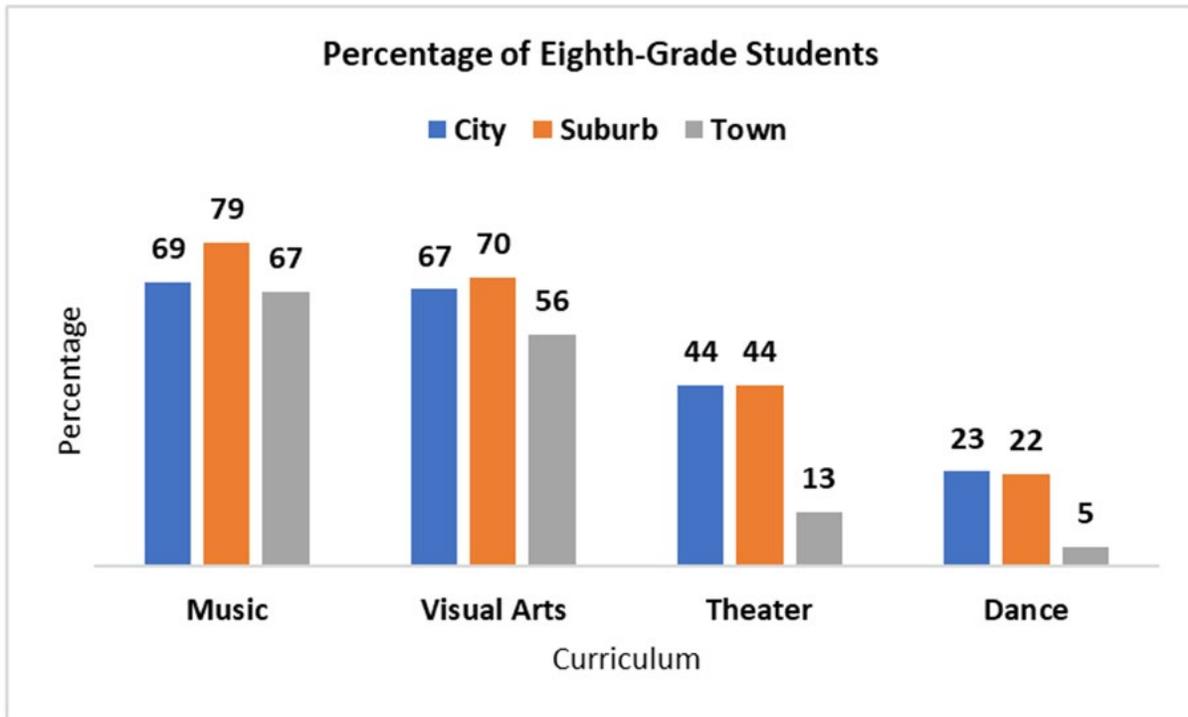
|                               | Music   |   |   | Visual Arts  |   |   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|                               | City  | Suburb  | Town  | City   | Suburb  | Town  |
| <b>White</b>                  |  156 |  162 |  149 |  158 |  161 |  151 |
| <b>Black</b>                  |  124 |  134 | ‡   |  126 |  129 | ‡   |
| <b>Hispanic</b>               |  130 |  138 |  126 |  136 |  138 |  138 |
| <b>Asian/Pacific Islander</b> |  150 |  164 | ‡   |  163 |  168 | ‡   |

Note: Color coding: Red = Lower; Green = Higher; Yellow = Middle.

Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](http://NDE.Core.Web.nationsreportcard.gov)

At the same time, NAEP data show that eighth-grade students in towns were less likely to have curriculum in music, visual arts, theater, and/or dance, compared with their peers in city and suburban schools (Figure 18). Another study — the High School Longitudinal Study (HSLs) — suggests that public high schools located in cities had the lowest availability of arts coursework — 78% of city schools offered at least one course in one of the four arts disciplines (Elpus, n.d.). This was less than the availability in suburban public high schools (90%), public high schools located in towns (90%), and in rural public high schools (91%).

Figure 18. Percentages for Eighth-Grade Students Whose Districts or States Have Curriculum in Arts Education (Music, Visual Arts, Theater, or Dance), by School Locale: 2016



Source: NDE Core Web ([nationsreportcard.gov](https://nationsreportcard.gov))

A rich body of literature posits that arts education supports students’ social-emotional needs and helps them to process their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Evidence shows that curricula in music, visual arts, theater, and dance can increase student interest in school and elevate student engagement in learning (Pottiger, 2023). The Center for Arts Education reported that schools with solid arts programs had higher graduation rates (Israel, 2009) and high-quality arts programs can improve student academic achievement (James et al., 2019). Yet not every student has access to arts education.

“As budget cuts loom, sustaining the arts is among K-12 challenges” (Barack, 2020). According to a study (Ingenuity, 2020), in Chicago Public Schools, as of the 2018-19 school year, there had been a 97% increase in regular access to arts education, but still, 35% of students, predominantly those who are Black and also economically disadvantaged, remained without consistent access to high-quality arts education. When the district implemented budget cuts, the time for arts instruction was significantly shortened (fewer than 90-120 minutes, a high standard of arts education).

In a 2012 national survey, more than half of educators reported that arts education received less instructional time and resources compared with English and math (The Farkas Duffett Research Group, 2012). In 2022, a music teacher in a Los Angeles Unified school — a school with 1,500 students who are mostly Hispanic from low-income families — decided to start an instrumental music program. A big challenge the music teacher faced was that the school only had 45 instruments for the 200 students in the program and some instruments needed repair (Freedberg, 2022). The American Academy of Arts & Sciences (2021) remarks, “Arts education was already in a state of crisis and dire need before the fraught year of 2020, and the pandemic has intensified that crisis exponentially.”

## STEM-based education

“STEM-based education teaches children more than science and mathematics concepts” ([The National Inventors Hall of Fame, 2023](#)). STEM courses focus on hands-on learning with real-world applications and help students to develop a variety of skill sets, including creativity and 21st century skills (e.g., media and technology literacy, communication, flexibility, and initiative). Through STEM education, students can develop problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, curiosity, decision making, leadership, entrepreneurship, acceptance of failure and more. Regardless of the future career path considered by each student, these skill sets go a long way to preparing all students to be innovative.

In urban areas, more than 90% of high school graduates (in both public and private schools) took at least one STEM course; more than 85% took at least one advanced math course; more than 80% took algebra II (Table 9). Most high school graduates took at least one advanced science course, such as chemistry.

Table 9. Percentage of High School Graduates Who Took Selected Science, Technology, Mathematics, and Engineering (STEM) Courses in High School, by Urban School Locale: 2019

| STEM Courses U.S.                           | City | Large | Midsize | Small | Suburban | Large | Midsize | Small | Town | Fringe | Distant | Remote |
|---|------|-------|---------|-------|----------|-------|---------|-------|------|--------|---------|--------|
| Any STEM course                             | 97   | 97    | 98      | 96    | 97       | 97    | 95      | 96    | 95   | 96     | 96      | 93     |
| Any advanced math course                    | 89   | 91    | 93      | 88    | 89       | 90    | 88      | 89    | 87   | 88     | 88      | 86     |
| Algebra II                                  | 85   | 85    | 86      | 82    | 84       | 85    | 85      | 83    | 85   | 85     | 85      | 85     |
| Precalculus                                 | 39   | 41    | 40      | 41    | 42       | 41    | 42      | 34    | 37   | 32     | 35      | 32     |
| Calculus                                    | 16   | 16    | 15      | 15    | 18       | 19    | 19      | 15    | 16   | 12     | 12      | 12     |
| Other advanced math                         | 26   | 26    | 25      | 26    | 29       | 26    | 27      | 25    | 25   | 23     | 26      | 24     |
| Any advanced science and engineering course | 88   | 90    | 90      | 88    | 90       | 90    | 91      | 85    | 83   | 83     | 86      | 84     |
| Advanced biology                            | 35   | 34    | 31      | 35    | 38       | 35    | 35      | 31    | 36   | 33     | 27      | 37     |
| Chemistry                                   | 75   | 77    | 78      | 74    | 76       | 78    | 79      | 69    | 74   | 69     | 70      | 72     |
| Advanced environmental/ earth science       | 16   | 16    | 14      | 16    | 18       | 19    | 20      | 21    | 12   | 9      | 18      | 6      |
| Physics                                     | 38   | 45    | 47      | 47    | 42       | 39    | 41      | 30    | 25   | 25     | 27      | 26     |
| Engineering                                 | 12   | 11    | 11      | 11    | 11       | 12    | 13      | 10    | 8    | 12     | 14      | 11     |
| Any technology course                       | 39   | 38    | 38      | 38    | 38       | 38    | 38      | 41    | 42   | 40     | 43      | 37     |
| Engineering/ science technologies           | 7    | 5     | 5       | 5     | 5        | 7     | 7       | 7     | 12   | 9      | 11      | 8      |
| Health science and technology               | 17   | 16    | 14      | 18    | 18       | 16    | 15      | 19    | 14   | 21     | 23      | 18     |
| Computer science                            | 20   | 20    | 22      | 19    | 20       | 20    | 20      | 20    | 21   | 15     | 15      | 14     |

Source: NCES [Table 225.46](#) prepared in 2022

Only a small percentage of graduates took courses of calculus, physics, engineering, computer science, or engineering/science technologies in high school.

- According to a 2021 study ([Hendrickson et al., 2021](#)), 51% of U.S. high schools offered foundational computer science, but disparities in access was persisting. Rural schools, city schools, and schools with high percentages of low-income students were less likely to offer computer science. Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaskan students were less likely to attend a school that offers computer science courses. Some researchers recommend that school districts should address the disparity, start building students’ foundational knowledge and skills early, and have curricula and resources in place to expand their learning throughout their K–12 education ([Slagg, 2022](#)).
- Helping students to build physical intuition and physical and analytical problem-solving skills is different from but as important as having students acquire mathematical skills ([Chang et al., 2018](#)). Taking courses in physics increases the chances for students to be enrolled in college and go into STEM careers. Early data (2009) show that only 36% of public high school seniors took physics; in contrast, virtually 100% of private high school seniors took physics ([Tom, 2011](#)). Across the country, 2 in 5 high schools did not offer physics, according to an Education Week Research Center analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights ([Loewus, 2016](#)).

## Dual enrollment

Dual enrollment (DE) is one of many terms used to describe a program that allows high school students to take a college course and earn both high school and college credit ([Rhine, 2022](#)). Access to college-level classes while in high school not only helps students to earn college credits, but also gives students a jumpstart in learning about and preparing for careers. According to the U.S. Department of Education ([2022](#)), “Approximately 88% of high schools offer dual enrollment, and 34% of U.S. students take college courses in high school.”

DE is widespread and growing, but unequal. Mostly, the growth of DE is taking place in less urbanized areas (towns and rural areas). Among 2019 high school graduates (in both public and private schools), in cities and suburban areas, only a quarter took at least one dual-enrollment course in high school (Table 10). High school graduates in towns were more likely to take dual-enrollment courses, compared with their peers in cities and suburban areas. In general, very few urban students took math, life sciences, social science and history, or visual and performing arts as their dual-enrollment courses in high school.

Table 10. Percentage of High School Graduates Who Took Selected Dual Enrollment Courses in High School, by Urban School Locale: 2019

| School Locale | Any dual enrollment course | English language and literature | Mathematics | Life and physical sciences | Social science and history | Visual and performing arts | World language and literature | Career/ technical education |
|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| City          | 26                         | 9                               | 7           | 4                          | 7                          | 3                          | 2                             | 11                          |
| Large         | 23                         | 8                               | 6           | 4                          | 7                          | 2                          | 2                             | 8                           |
| Midsize       | 26                         | 7                               | 7           | 2                          | 5                          | 3                          | †                             | 13                          |
| Small         | 33                         | 12                              | 10          | 6                          | 10                         | 4                          | 2                             | 17                          |
| Suburban      | 23                         | 8                               | 7           | 4                          | 6                          | 3                          | 4                             | 10                          |
| Large         | 23                         | 8                               | 7           | 4                          | 7                          | 3                          | 4                             | 10                          |
| Midsize       | 22                         | 5                               | 4           | 2                          | 4                          | 1                          | †                             | 13                          |
| Small         | 24                         | 8                               | 6           | 5                          | 5                          | 2                          | †                             | 14                          |
| Town          | 41                         | 18                              | 12          | 6                          | 12                         | 3                          | 4                             | 20                          |
| Fringe        | 32                         | 13                              | 13          | 2                          | 9                          | 2                          | †                             | 18                          |
| Distant       | 41                         | 20                              | 11          | 6                          | 15                         | 5                          | 2                             | 18                          |
| Remote        | 49                         | 18                              | 15          | 9                          | 10                         | 2                          | †                             | 26                          |

Note: Color coding: Red = Relatively Fewer Students; Green = Relatively More Students; Yellow = Between fewer and more.

Source: NCES [Table 225.65](#) prepared in 2022

Unfortunately, “Dual enrollment is often less accessible at schools that serve larger proportions of lower-income communities and communities of color, [and even] when it is available, students from these same communities participate at lower rates” ([Rhine, 2022](#)). Researchers found that “2 in 5 Black and Latino students say they really enjoy STEM courses and aspire to go to college, but less than 3% are enrolling in STEM courses” ([Patrick et al., 2022](#)).

School districts are recommended to (a) diligently share information with all parents and students about dual enrollment, STEM courses, STEM career pathways, advanced coursework opportunities, the benefits of enrolling in these courses, and the process to enroll; and (b) have an adequate number of school counselors who can identify courses that are rigorous and challenging to meet the interests and aspirations of all students.

## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 5: How to Help More Disadvantaged Students Participate in AP Courses

### Virtual Advanced Preparation Program in South Huntington School District (New York)

The South Huntington School District (SHSD) is a [large suburban](#) school district. The district benefits from Title I (A) federal funds, which are based solely on levels of poverty (percentage of students benefitting from free or reduced-priced lunch). Approximately 9% of the student population are English learners (ELs). The district has been focusing on closing the achievement gap within the diverse student population for years, and the result is encouraging.

- Districtwide, more than 25% of the students, regardless of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, participated in Advanced Placement (AP) programs.
- Among the graduating class, 30% were recognized with AP scholar designation.

A key to the SHSD's success in closing the student achievement gap is a program created to provide support to those students who otherwise would not see themselves as being capable of advanced coursework. Through the virtual advanced preparation program, the district has successfully expanded the pool of students who want to participate in AP courses. The district implements two approaches in the program:

- First, students at different ability levels are provided an opportunity — a blended model for academic support — to participate in AP classes at the high school level. Through the model, both students and teachers have access to AP courses using Chromebooks during summer workshops.
- Once students reach certain grade levels in the program, they can add classes, a Student Center lab, before- and after-school learning sessions, and parent meetings and conferences. The purpose for the additional support is to make sure that these students can successfully complete their AP courses.

The district found that this program works. There has been a 42% increase in the amount of AP exams given over the last 10 years; a 34% increase in the total number of students taking AP courses/exams. For the last five years, the number of Black students taking AP exams has doubled, and 30% more Hispanic students took AP exams. About 50% of students are leaving high school with six or more college credits.

Source: [2023 Magna Awards Silver Award Winners and Honorable Mentions \(nsba.org\)](#)

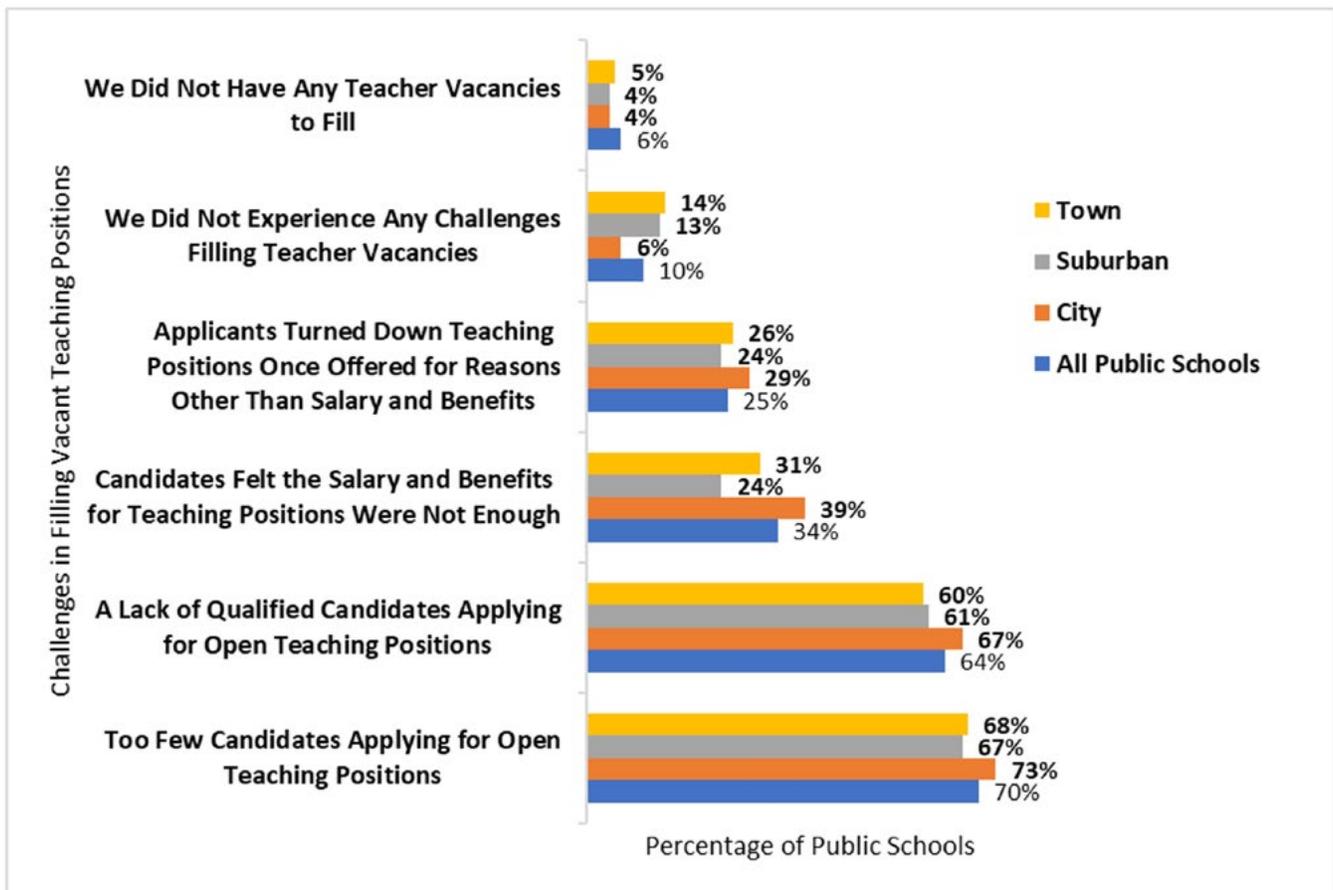
### 3. Effective educators

Effective educators are dedicated to closing achievement gaps and preparing students for postsecondary success ([Idaho State Department of Education, n.d.](#)). They not only have the knowledge, skill, and commitment to create fair learning opportunities and growth for all students, but also are able to create strategies that help students achieve academic success, which enables them to be lifelong learners ([Colorado Department of Education, n.d.](#)). A big challenge that both urban and rural schools are facing when providing high-quality education for every student is the urgent need for effective educators.

#### Educator shortages

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an urgent search for teachers ([Fortin and Fawcett, 2023](#)). In August 2022, about 95% of urban schools were looking for teacher candidates to fill in their teacher vacancies for the 2022-23 school year (Figure 19). Very few schools reported that they did not experience any challenges when filling teacher vacancies. More than 60% of schools reported that the challenges for them to fill vacant teaching positions was either too few candidates or a lack of qualified candidates applying for the position.

Figure 19. Percentage of Public Schools, by Challenges in Filling Vacant Teaching Positions for the 2022-23 School Year and by Urban School Location: August 2022



Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

Data suggest that urban schools have more challenges to fill teaching positions in areas such as general elementary education, special education, bilingual education, English and math (Table 11).

- In the fall of 2022, 1 in 3 public schools in cities, 1 in 5 suburban schools, and nearly 1 in 5 schools in towns lacked at least one general elementary teacher.
- The second most common area in teacher shortages was special education; 28% of city schools, 21% of suburban schools, and 17% of schools in towns needed to fill at least one teaching position in special education.
- Schools in towns had more difficulties in filling in the teaching positions in foreign languages (16%) and computer science (18%).

Table 11. Percentage of Public Schools That Reported At least One Vacancy, by Teaching Position and School Location: October 2022

| Teaching Position             | All Public Schools | City | Suburban | Town |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------|----------|------|
| General Elementary            | 24%                | 33%  | 21%      | 17%  |
| Special Education             | 21%                | 28%  | 21%      | 17%  |
| ESL or Bilingual Education    | 12%                | 14%  | 9%       | 11%  |
| Mathematics                   | 10%                | 8%   | 9%       | 6%   |
| English or Language Arts      | 9%                 | 16%  | 5%       | 5%   |
| Foreign Languages             | 9%                 | 6%   | 5%       | 16%  |
| Physical Sciences             | 9%                 | 9%   | 5%       | 9%   |
| Career or Technical Education | 9% ‡               |      | 13% ‡    |      |
| Biology or Life Sciences      | 7%                 | 6%   | 9% ‡     |      |
| Computer Science              | 7%                 | 10%  | 4%       | 18%  |
| Music or Arts                 | 7%                 | 5%   | 9%       | 7%   |
| Social Studies                | 6%                 | 5%   | 2%       | 8%   |
| Physical Education or Health  | 5% ‡               |      | 7%       | 6%   |

Note: ‡ Data are not available. Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

In 2019, approximately 52% of school personnel were non-teaching employees, according to data from the [NCES](#). In October 2022, urban schools reported that they were short of the following non-teaching staff ([School Pulse Panel, 2023](#)):

- Custodial staff (about 25% of schools in cities, 19% in suburbs, and 21% in towns).
- Nutrition staff (about 18% of schools in cities and 17% in suburbs).
- Mental health professionals (10% of city schools and 9% of suburban schools).

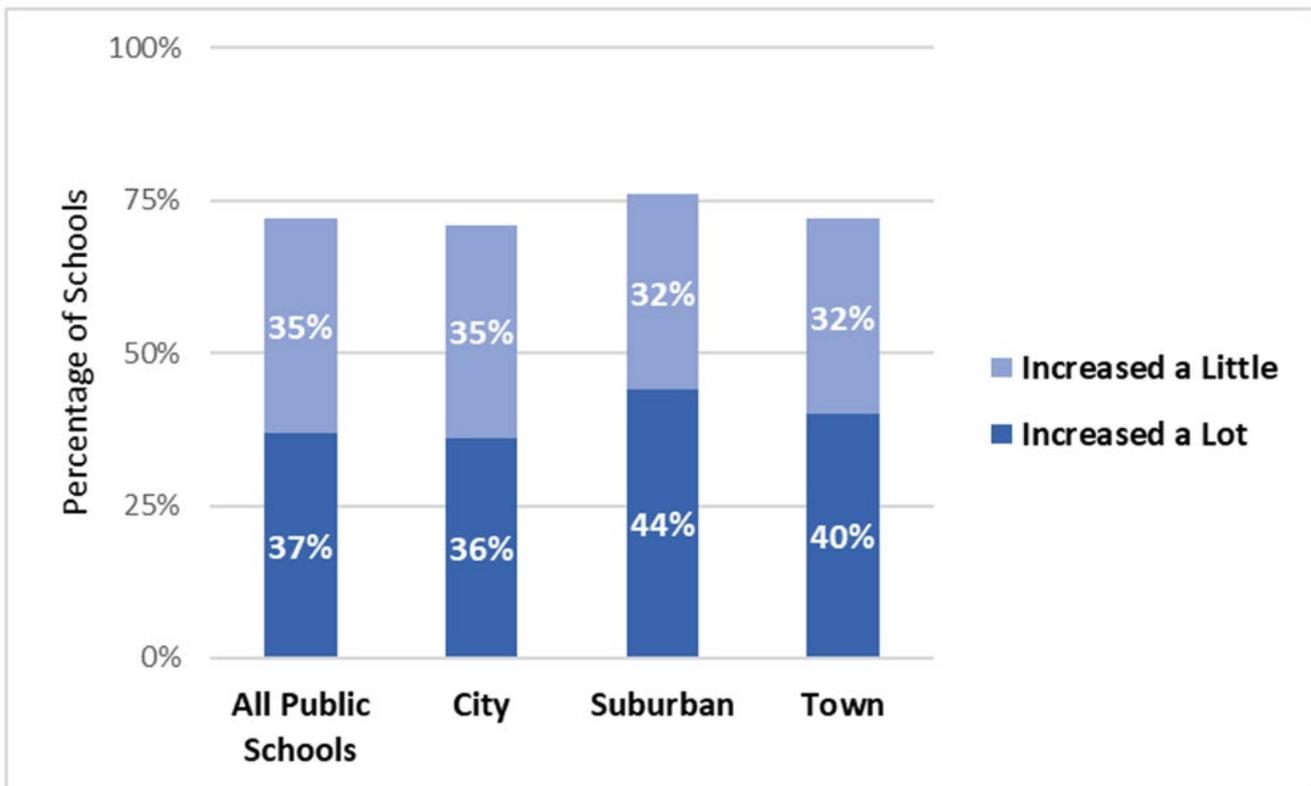
## Chronic teacher absenteeism

In 2012, nearly 2 in 5 teachers (36%) were absent more than 10 days a year, according to “Teacher Absence as a Leading Indicator of Student Achievement,” a report conducted by the Center for American Progress ([Miller, 2012](#)). Data from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) show that on average, nearly 29% of teachers were considered chronically absent (missing 10 or more school days) in the 2015-16 school year ([Hansen and Quintero, 2020](#)). Researchers find that teacher absences in the U.S. are notably large in comparison to other industries and countries ([Clotfelter et al., 2009](#); [Frontline Education, 2016](#)).

“Three years into the pandemic, nearly all schools have reopened their campuses, but teachers and students alike aren’t showing up” ([Sparks, 2022](#)). In some states, such as Arizona, nearly 4 in 5 teaching positions (measured in terms of full-time equivalencies) in schools “had to be covered in less-than-ideal ways — by support staff, for example, or teachers in training” ([ASPAA, 2023](#); [Fortin and Fawcett, 2023](#)). New federal data show [chronic absenteeism](#) — defined as missing 10% or more of school days — has continued to rise among both students and teachers in public schools. As Figure 20 shows, in 2022:

- More than 70% of urban schools experienced an increase in chronic teacher absenteeism during the 2021-22 school year, compared with a typical school year before the pandemic.
- Chronic teacher absenteeism has increased since the pandemic in suburban schools (44%) and schools in towns (40%).

Figure 20. Percentage of Public Schools That Reported Increase in Chronic Teacher Absenteeism During the 2021-22 School Year in Comparison to a Typical School Year Before the Pandemic, by Urban School Location: May 2022



Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

Researchers ([Greene and Bulcher, 2023](#)) find that teacher chronic absenteeism rates were slightly higher for teachers in schools that enrolled more minority students. Among schools with high ethnic minority enrollment (i.e., 25% to 75% of the student body is non-White), 74% of school officials reported increased rates of teacher absenteeism relative to pre-pandemic levels. At schools in which ethnic minorities comprise less than 25% of the student body, 71% of school officials reported increased rates of teacher absenteeism.

It should be noted that teacher chronic absenteeism is based on the number of days that teachers are absent from work, regardless of what causes their absence ([UNESCO, 2022](#)). Health issues, including mental health problems, can lead to teacher chronic absenteeism. In April 2022, public school officials reported that more staff had sought mental health services from the school since the start of the pandemic ([School Pulse Panel, 2023](#)). The increase in staff seeking mental health services was reported by 30% of city schools, 33% of suburban schools, and 23% of schools in towns.

Research suggests that schools in which teachers experience higher levels of stress, lack educator collaboration, or have an unsupportive school climate, could plausibly face higher teacher absences ([Hansen and Quintero, 2020](#); [Miller, 2012](#)). The following are some research-based solutions to teacher chronic absenteeism and strategies used by school districts ([Hansen and Quintero, 2020](#)):

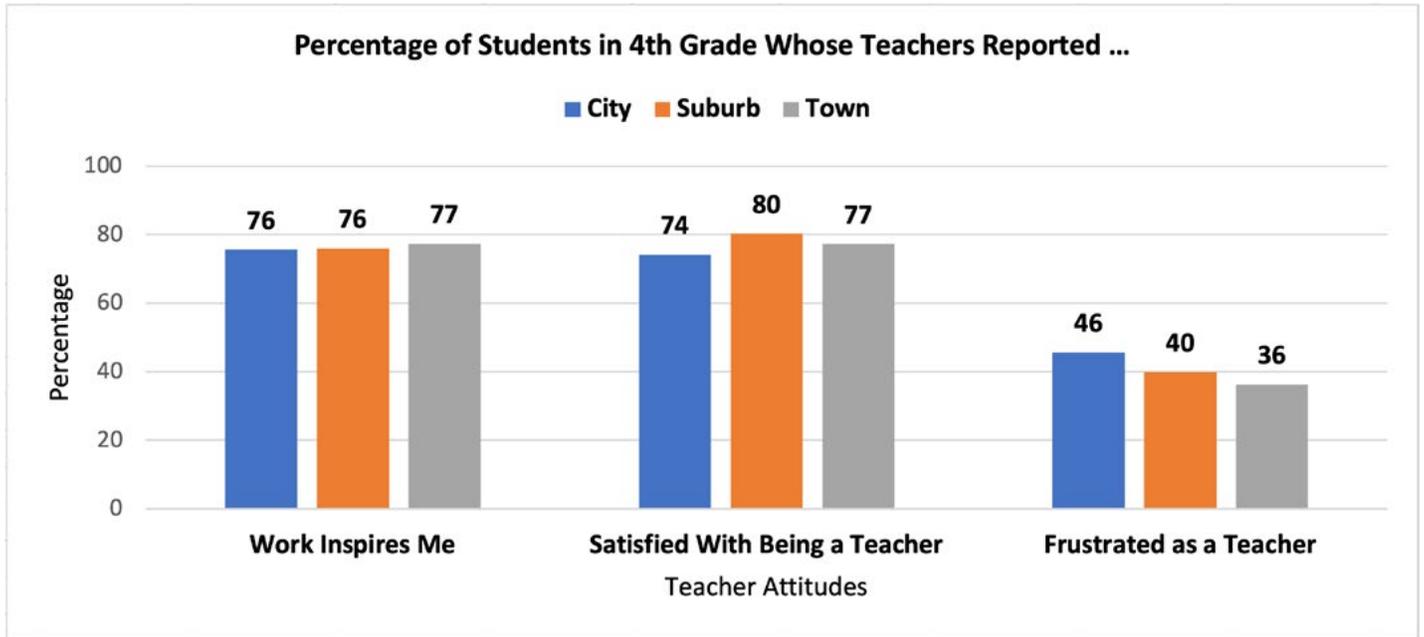
- Using data of teacher contracts from New York school districts, researchers found that stronger teacher attendance was associated with certain policies like bonuses for high attendance or a sick leave buy-back program ([Enrenberg et al., 1991](#)).
- Another analysis of New York teachers showed that teacher attendance increased during the first year of an incentive plan in which teachers could receive monetary compensation for missing less than seven days ([Jacobson, 1989](#)).
- A study of teacher absences in North Carolina concludes that a policy that simultaneously raises salaries and imposes small penalties on absences would both increase teachers' expected incomes and lower districts' costs ([Clotfelter et al., 2009](#)).
- Some districts have adopted an incentive plan in which teachers with two or fewer absences can receive additional contributions to their [retirement plan](#). The implementation has helped those districts to reduce costs and increase the number of teachers with perfect attendance in a year ([Knoster, 2016](#); [SREB, n.d.](#)).

## Teacher attitudes and expectations

“A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning” ([Brad Henry](#)). The likelihood of students having such good educators would be low if teachers have little passion for teaching and are constantly stressed out. The Nation's Report Card not only assesses students' academic performance, but also surveys their teachers' attitudes and expectations. Data show both encouraging and discouraging information.

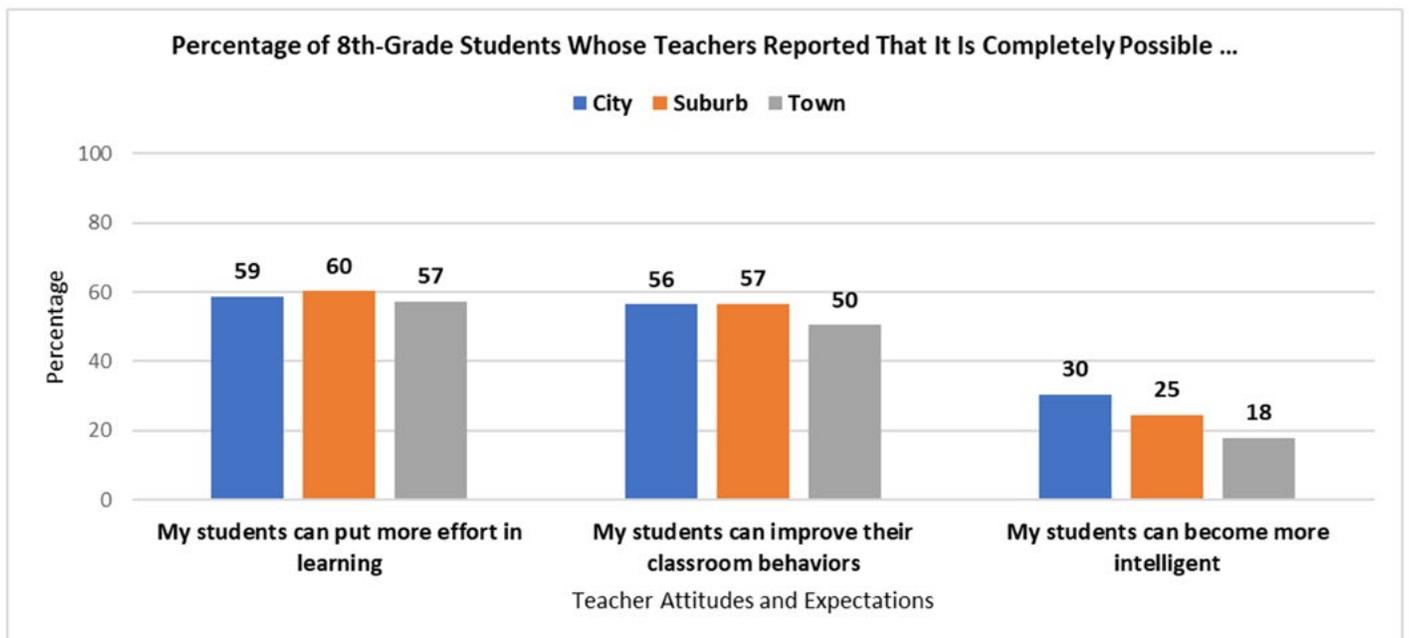
- In 2022, more than 70% of fourth-grade students in urban public schools had teachers who were inspired by their work and felt satisfied with being a teacher (Figure 21). In city schools, nearly half of the students (46%) had teachers who felt frustrated in their profession.
- In 2022, at least half of eighth-grade students in urban public schools had teachers who strongly believed that students could behave well in the classroom and change their performance by putting forth a lot of effort (Figure 22). Most teachers, particularly in towns, did not feel that their students can change their level of intelligence much.

Figure 21. Percentage of Fourth-Grade Students, by Selected Teachers' Attitudes and Urban School Locations: 2022



Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

Figure 22. Percentage of Eighth-Grade Students, by Selected Teachers' Attitudes and Urban School Locations: 2022



Source: [NDE Core Web \(nationsreportcard.gov\)](https://nationsreportcard.gov)

## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 6: How Districts Improve Working Conditions to Retain Good Teachers

### Collaboration Between School Leaders and Teachers

Educator shortages and high rates of teacher chronic absenteeism are related to working conditions ([Schmitt and DeCourcy, 2022](#)). By improving working conditions, schools can retain good teachers and attract high-quality teacher candidates. To foster healthy work environments for educators, school leaders may consider strategies to establish a good rapport with teachers.

### Building Trust in Thornton Township High School District 205 (Illinois)

Catalyst for Educational Change (CEC) is a nonprofit consulting agency working to solve complex problems in educational systems. On its website, CEC published case studies of the districts it has worked with. [Thornton Township High School District 205](#) (Thornton HSD), a low-income district in Chicago's southern suburbs, is one of the case studies. CEC recorded the following journey of the district's labor management collaboration.

- “Teachers and school administrators in the district were desperate to provide effective education to students. However, a toxic culture of misunderstanding and mistrust had taken hold among the school board, district administration, and the teachers union.”
- The district urgently needed to create a collaborative culture, which was an essential first step to improving student achievement.
- With CEC's expertise in supporting districts to build collaborative cultures, the district created realistic goals, mission, and focus with stakeholders' input. A District Transformation Council and a School Transformation Council were established and supported with comprehensive training and coaching.
- Trusting relationships were built among the three anchors and the District Transformation Council and the School Transformation Councils were ready to begin addressing specific student achievement goals.

The district's culture change has brought about multilevel supports for teachers. For instance, the [assistant superintendent of business operations](#) said, “A real source of pride in my department is that we are a team — looking out for each other and making sure that our students and teachers have the tools they need to succeed in the classroom every day.”

The [director of technology and communications systems](#) remarked, “Our mission is to bridge the gap between technology and curriculum. When this is done correctly, the teachers can focus on giving our students the very best education. We all use technology tools to enhance our daily lives. My department reviews the tools available, and we choose only the best. These tools make it possible for our students and teachers to reach their highest potential.”

In a recent issue of the district's [magazine](#), the school board president announced the following student achievement:

- Overall, the district saw expected levels of growth from the 2021-22 to the 2022-23 school year.
- Students at two schools had a greater than expected growth in math.
- IB, AP, and honors students saw greater than expected growth in English, reading, writing, and math.

### **Collaborating for Student Success**

In 2022, several national education organizations worked together and published a comprehensive, practical guidebook for increasing shared decision-making through lasting partnerships. The guidebook, titled "[Collaborating for Student Success](#)," describes how to sustain collaboration through frameworks, structures, research, and evaluations. "Collaborating for Student Success is an invaluable roadmap for why—and how—everyone with a stake in student learning can work together to build trust, create buy-in for shared education goals, and build a system that supports collaboration" ([Heim, 2022](#)).

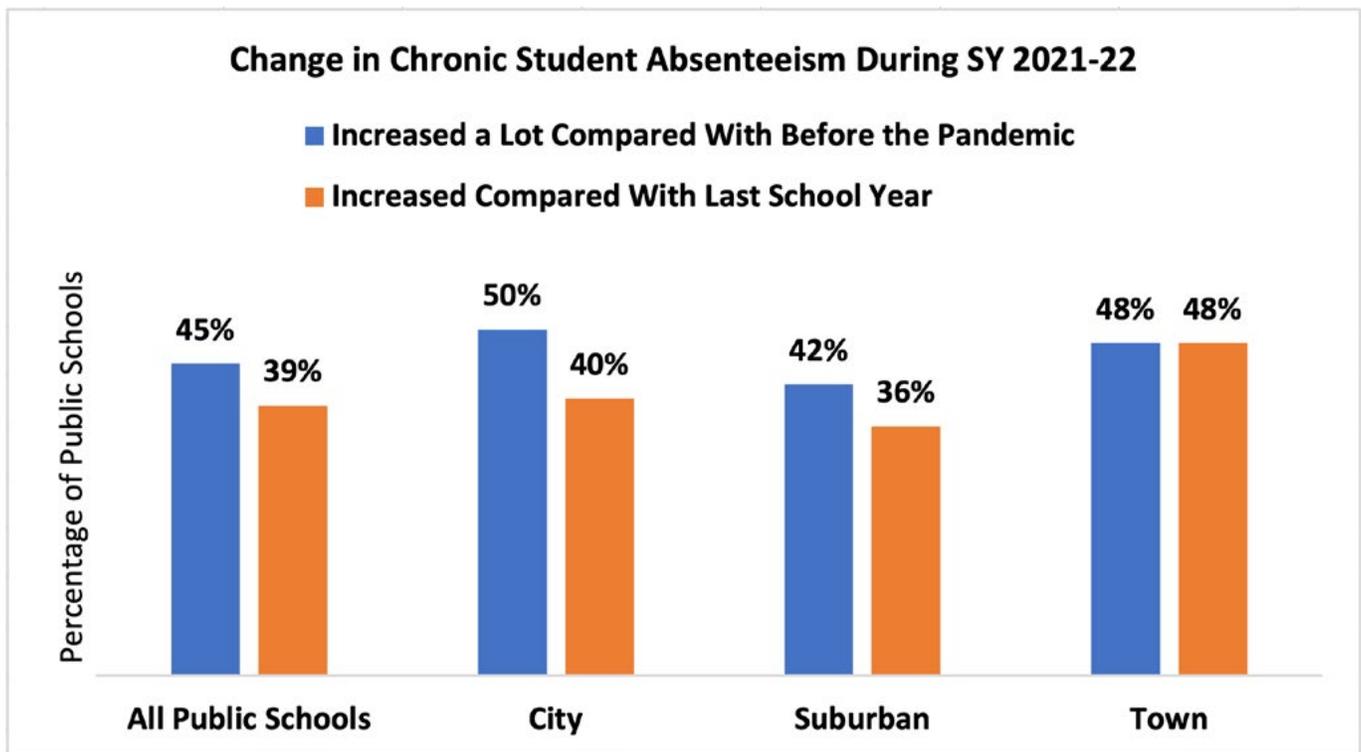
## 4. Safe and supportive school climate

“School climate is a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student’s educational experience” ([National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.](#)). Positive educational experience is a significant part of high-quality education for every student and should play a critical role in improving every student’s academic performance. Safe and supportive school climate generally means fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting—from pre-k/elementary school to higher education.

### Post-pandemic student behavior changes

More than a year after the nation’s return to in-person learning, schools still see a surge of student disruptive behavior, and educators say students are still struggling to adjust to life back in the classroom ([Shen-Berro, 2023](#)). One challenge that schools are facing is an increase in student chronic absenteeism. During the 2021-22 school year, 50% of city schools, 48% of schools in towns, and 42% of suburban schools reported that student chronic absenteeism increased a lot, compared with a typical year before the start of the pandemic (Figure 23). Compared with the previous school year (2020-21), more schools in cities (48%) and towns (40%) still saw an increase in student chronic absenteeism (vs. 36% of suburban schools).

Figure 23. Percentage of Public Schools, by Change in Chronic Student Absenteeism During the 2021-22 School Year in Comparison With a Typical Year Before the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic or Since Last School Year (2020-21), and by School Location: May 2022

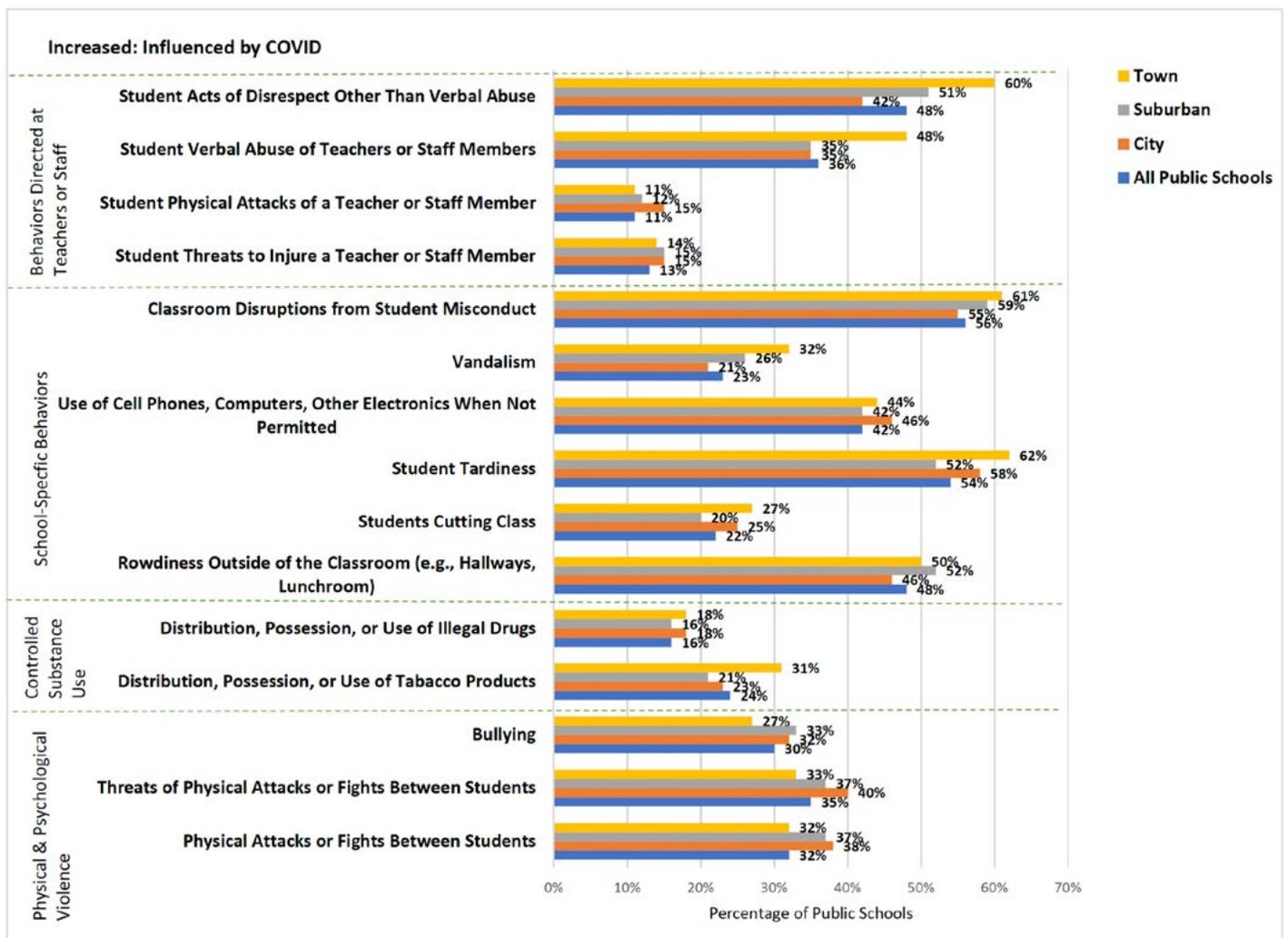


Source: School Pulse Panel (ed.gov)

“U.S. students are rowdier than ever post-COVID. How’s a teacher to teach?” *USA Today* raised an important question in its recent news report ([Jimenez, 2023](#)). In 2022, more than half of urban schools reported increases in various student disruptive behaviors in school and in the classroom because of the influence of the pandemic (Figure 24). For example:

- In towns, at least 3 in 5 schools experienced an increase in student tardiness (62%), classroom disruptions from student misconduct (61%), and student acts of disrespect for educators other than verbal abuse (61%).
- Among suburban schools, more than half had to deal with an increase in student tardiness (52%), rowdiness outside of the classroom (e.g., hallways, lunchroom) (52%), classroom disruptions from student misconduct (59%), and student acts of disrespect for educators other than verbal abuse (51%).
- More city schools saw an increase in student physical attacks of a teacher or staff member (15%), physical attacks or fights between students (38%), and threats of physical attacks or fights between students (40%), compared with suburban schools and schools in towns.

Figure 24. Percentage of Public Schools That Reported Student Behavior Changes Because of the Influence of the Pandemic During the 2021-22 School Year Compared With a Typical School Year Before the Start of COVID-19, by School Location: May 2022

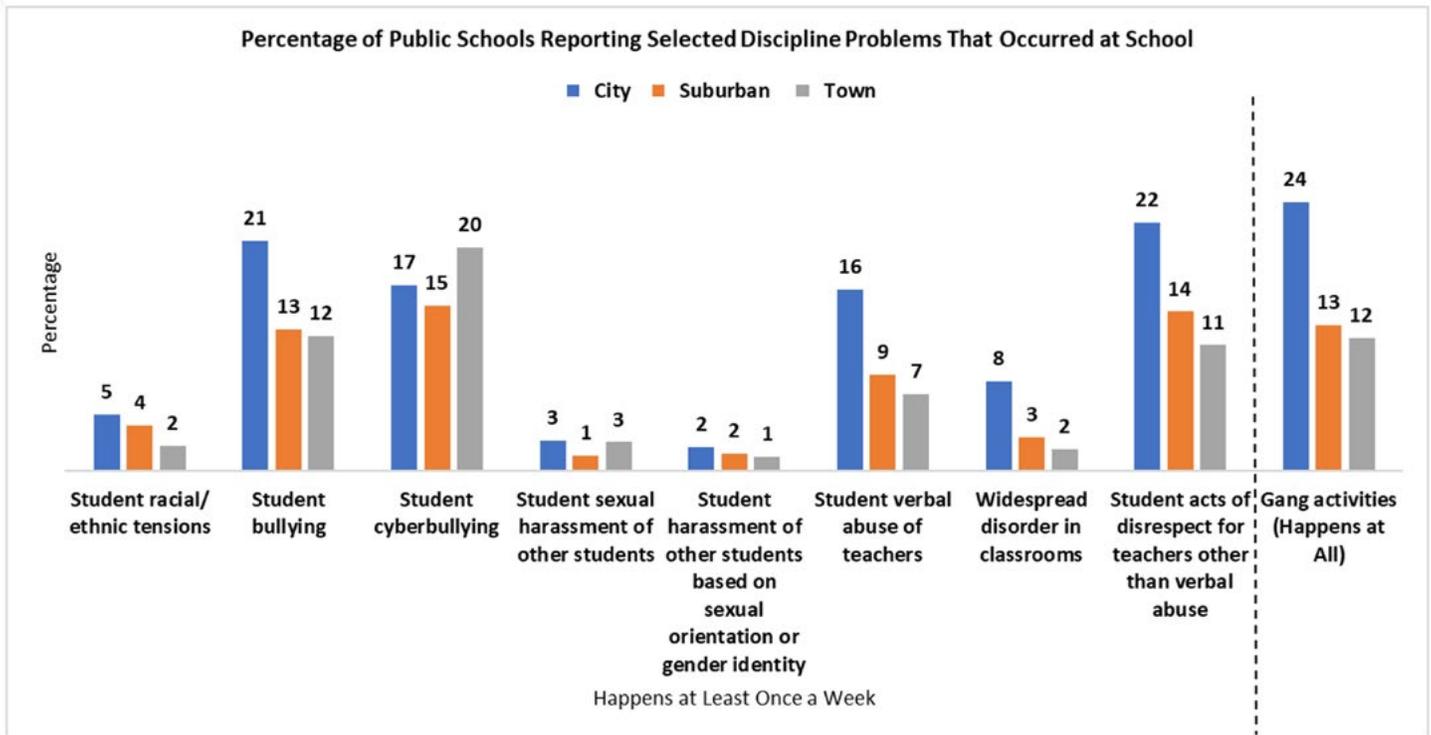


Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

## School discipline

In the 2019-20 school year, schools often reported discipline problems such as student bullying, cyberbullying, student acts of disrespect for teachers, and gang activities (Figure 25). Compared with suburban schools and schools in towns, more city schools seemed to have discipline problems such as student bullying (21%), student verbal abuse of teachers (16%), student acts of disrespect for teachers other than verbal abuse (22%), and gang activities (24%). By contrast, schools in towns (20%) were more likely to report the discipline problem of student cyberbullying, compared with city schools (17%) and suburban schools (15%).

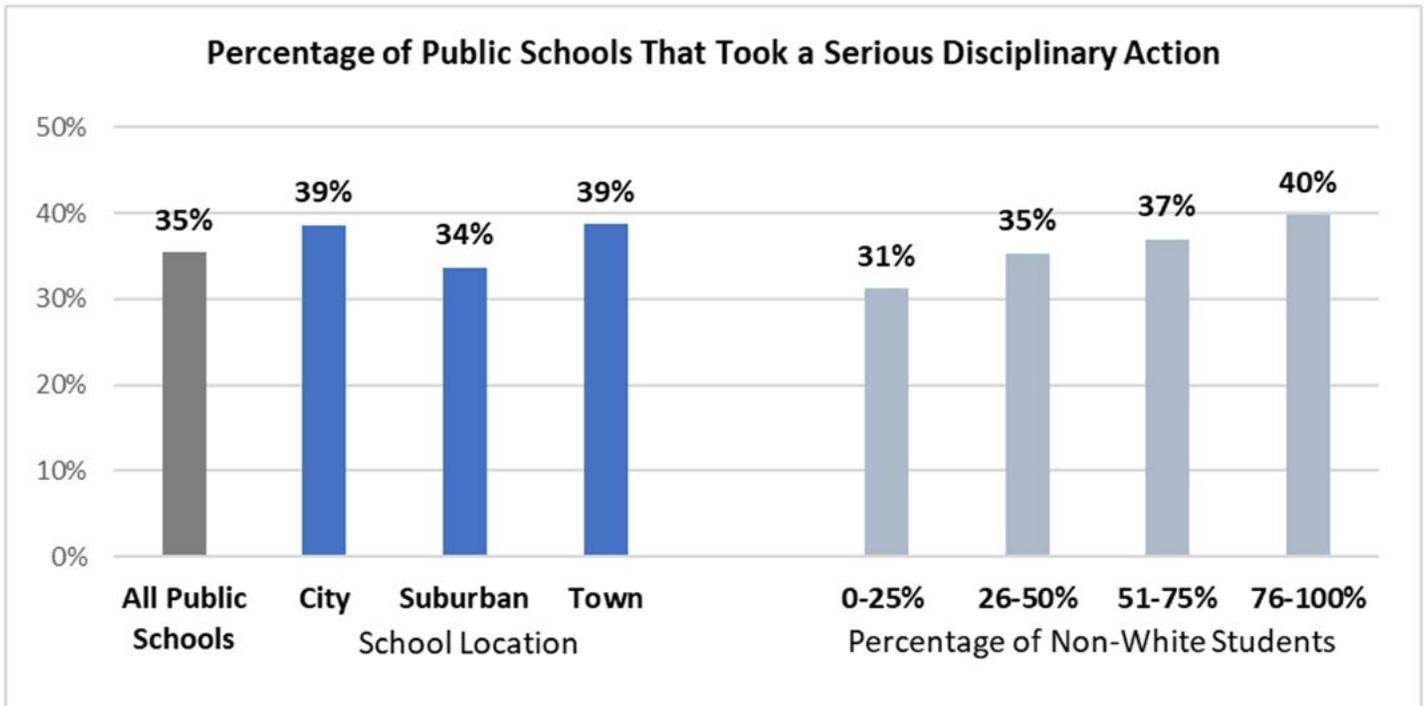
Figure 25. Percentage of Public Schools Reporting Selected Discipline Problems That Occurred at School, by Urban School Locale: 2019-20



Source: NCES [Table 230.10](#) prepared in 2021.

Serious disciplinary actions refer to out-of-school suspensions lasting five or more days, removals with no services for the remainder of the school year, and transfers to alternative schools (NCES, 2022). In the 2019-20 school year, more schools in cities and towns (39% respectively) reported that they took at least one serious disciplinary action against students, compared with suburban schools (Figure 26). At the same time, schools with high percentage of minority or non-White students were more likely to take serious disciplinary actions against students (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Percentage of Public Schools That Took a Serious Disciplinary Action, by Urban School Location, and by Percentage of Non-White Students in the School: 2019-20



Source: COE - [Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools \(ed.gov\)](#)

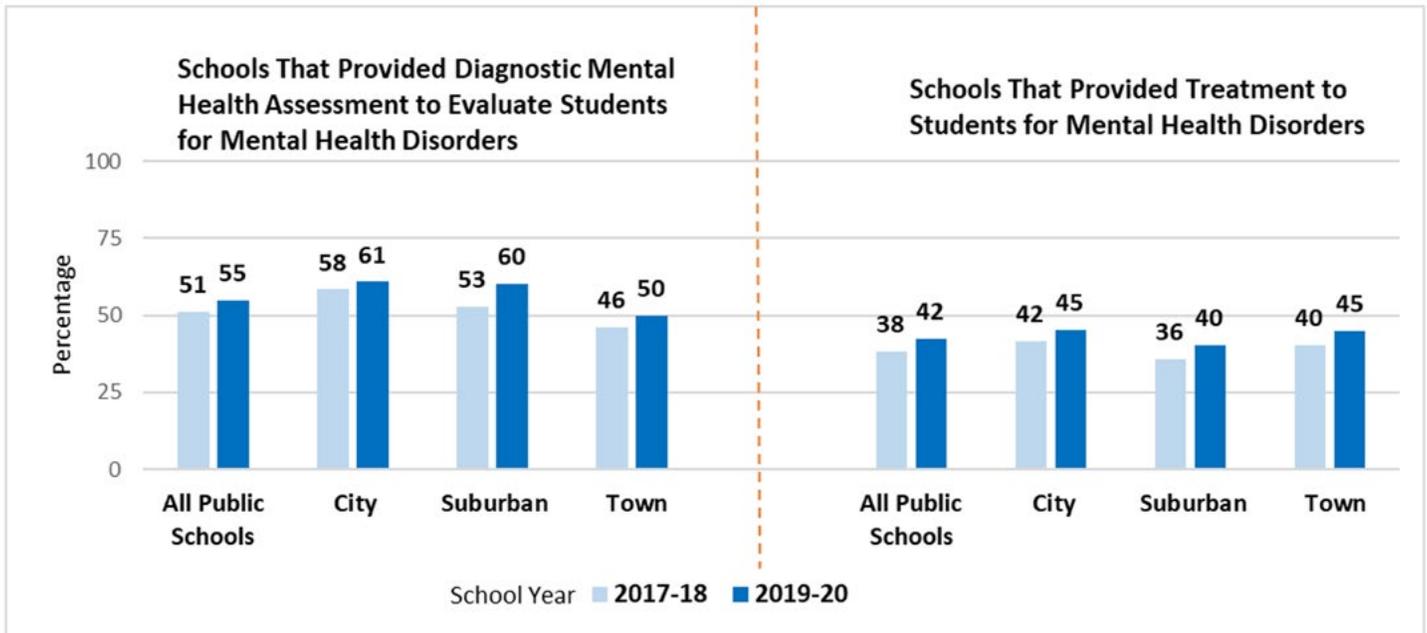
Parents value school safety as much as high-quality curricula and effective teachers. [Data](#) show that in 2018-19, about one-third of public-school parents were not very satisfied with their children’s schools. Among these parents, 70% in cities, 74% in suburban areas, and 69% in towns rated school safety (including student discipline) as a very important factor when considering other schools for their children. Among these parents, 82% of Black, 73% of Hispanic, and 71% of Asian/Pacific Islander rated school safety as a very important factor for choosing their children’s schools (vs. 66% of White).

### Student mental health

“Living in poverty is associated with differences in structural and functional brain development in children and adolescents in areas related to cognitive processes that are critical for learning, communication, and academic achievement, including social emotional processing, memory, language, and executive functioning” ([American Psychological Association, 2022](#)). There has been an increase in schools that provided diagnostic mental health assessments and treatment to students among urban schools (Figure 27).

- In the 2019-20 school year, about 3 in 5 schools in cities and suburban areas provided diagnostic assessments to evaluate student mental health.
- In the 2019-20 school year, nearly half the city schools (45%) and schools in towns (45%) provided mental health treatment to students.
- In 2022, nearly 70% of public school officials reported that more students had sought mental health services from the school since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic ([School Pulse Panel, 2023](#)). Among suburban schools, 77% saw an increase (vs. 69% of schools in cities and towns respectively).

Figure 27. Percentage of Public Schools That Provided Diagnostic Mental Health Assessments and Treatment to Students, by Urban School Locale: 2017-18 vs. 2019-20



Source: NCES [Table 233.69a](#) prepared in 2021.

In 2022, most urban school officials reported that they had taken various actions to help students cope with mental health issues caused or triggered by the pandemic (Table 12).

- At least 4 in 5 urban schools encouraged their staff to address student social, emotional, and mental well-being.
- About 3 in 5 urban schools offered professional development to teachers on helping students with social, emotional, and mental well-being.
- About 2 in 5 urban schools hired new staff to focus on student social, emotional, and mental well-being.
- About half the schools in cities (49%) and suburbs (52%) created or expanded a program for students' social, emotional, and mental well-being.
- While working with communities to improve student mental well-being is critical, only 23% of city schools, 28% of suburban schools, and 17% of schools in towns created community events and partnerships to promote student mental health.

Table 12 also shows that at least 4 in 5 urban schools provided individual-based mental health intervention services in schools. Half of urban schools had mental health needs assessment. Two-thirds of suburban schools provided group-based mental health intervention to students (vs. 62% of city schools and 50% of schools in towns).

*Table 12. Percentage of Public Schools That Took Actions to Help Students Cope With the COVID-19 Pandemic and Schools and Percentage of Public Schools That Provided School-Based Mental Health Services to Students, by Urban School Location: April 2022*

| Schools That Took Actions to Help Students Cope With the COVID-19 Pandemic              | All Public Schools | City | Suburban | Town |
|---|--------------------|------|----------|------|
| Encouraged Existing Staff to Address Student Mental Well-being                          | 85%                | 89%  | 91%      | 82%  |
| Offered Professional Development to Teachers on Helping Students With Mental Well-being | 57%                | 64%  | 60%      | 58%  |
| Created or Expanded a Program for Students' Mental Well-being                           | 46%                | 49%  | 52%      | 43%  |
| Hired New Staff to Focus on Student Mental Well-being                                   | 41%                | 44%  | 43%      | 45%  |
| Added Student Classes on Mental Well-being  | 27%                | 33%  | 32%      | 25%  |
| Offered Guest Speakers for Students on Mental Well-being                                | 24%                | 23%  | 28%      | 25%  |
| Held Assemblies for Students on Mental Well-being                                       | 21%                | 21%  | 25%      | 20%  |
| Created Community Events and Partnerships for Students on Mental Well-being             | 22%                | 23%  | 28%      | 17%  |
| <b>Schools That Provided School-Based Mental Health Services to Students</b>            |                    |      |          |      |
| Individual-Based Intervention   | 84%                | 82%  | 87%      | 89%  |
| Case Management   | 69%                | 70%  | 75%      | 68%  |
| External Referrals  | 66%                | 71%  | 69%      | 72%  |
| Group-Based Intervention  | 56%                | 62%  | 66%      | 50%  |
| Needs Assessment  | 53%                | 55%  | 55%      | 51%  |
| Family-Based Intervention   | 38%                | 46%  | 42%      | 34%  |
| Outreach  | 34%                | 35%  | 39%      | 32%  |

Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)



## What programs work for student well-being

Investing in an effective program to improve student well-being is critical for district leaders. According to the federal government's What Works Clearinghouse ([WWC](#)), the following intervention programs have relatively strong evidence of effectiveness based on WWC's rigorous research standards:

- [Good Behavior Game](#), a classroom management strategy, aims to improve social skills, minimize disruptive behaviors, and create a positive learning environment. Teachers place students into teams and reward them for demonstrating appropriate behaviors and following classroom rules. "Good Behavior Game had positive effects on student behavior and teacher practice and potentially positive effects on student writing conventions and writing productivity compared with business-as-usual programs."
- [Functional Behavioral Assessment \(FBA\)](#) is an individualized problem-solving process for addressing student problem behavior. An assessment is conducted to identify the purpose or function of a student's problem behavior. This assessment process involves collecting information about the environmental conditions that precede the problem behavior and the subsequent rewards that reinforce the behavior. The information is then used to identify and implement individualized interventions aimed at reducing problem behaviors and increasing positive behaviors. FBA-based interventions were found to have potentially positive effects on school engagement and potentially positive effects on problem behavior for children identified with or at risk for an emotional disturbance based on evidence from single-case design studies.
- [First Step to Success](#), an early intervention educational program that is aimed at improving student outcomes. The program was designed to help children who are at risk for developing aggressive or antisocial behavioral patterns. The program uses a trained behavior coach who works with each student and his or her class peers, teacher, and parents for approximately 50–60 hours over a three-month period. It includes three interconnected modules: screening, classroom intervention, and parent training. The program was found to have positive effects on external behavior, potentially positive effects on emotional/internal behavior, social outcomes, and other academic performance.
- [Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) is based on a study that suggests that providing early childhood teachers with individualized consultation on classroom management and students' behavioral challenges improved classroom environments and student behaviors.
- [Homework Interventions for Students with ADHD as Implemented by School Mental Health Providers](#) is a program in which students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in grades 6-8 received up to 16 one-on-one sessions with a school mental health provider over an 11-week period. The sessions focused on building students' skills around topics such as organizing and managing school materials, recording homework, and planning and time management. Students brought homework or study materials to the session and worked with the school mental health provider to set a work completion goal. The school mental health providers praised students throughout the session and rewarded students for on-task behavior and for achieving their work completion goals.



## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 7: How Some School Districts Break the Status Quo

### Examples of Urban School Districts with High Percentages of Racial Minority Students

Student cultural diversity in a school district can be an asset ([Nishioka, 2018](#)). In urban schools, however, concentration of minority communities is often juxtaposed with de facto segregated schools. The U.S. Government Accountability Office ([GAO, 2022](#)) reported that “Predominantly White schools are more often in rural areas, while predominantly Black and Hispanic schools are generally located in urban and suburban locales.”

Many school districts with high percentages of Black or Hispanic students are breaking the status quo and overcoming economic difficulties to support and inspire each student to succeed in life and learning. In these districts, school leaders and educators make great efforts that involve working with their communities and setting high expectations for the success of their students. The following are some examples:

- In the school district of [Madison CUSD 12](#) (Illinois), 90% of students are Black. The district motto is “Growth. Resilience. Improvement. Tenacity. (GRIT).” Recently, students took second and third place in the [Edwardsville Olympiads](#), a local competition of problem-solving activities requiring higher level thinking and group task skills. The [district's high school band](#) had opportunities to participate in the Louis Armstrong HBCU Jazz Festival at the Tennessee State University and a trip to Europe. “Play music, see the world” is becoming a reality for minority students in this district.
- In the [Pontiac City School District](#) (Michigan), 51% of students are Black and 36% are Hispanic. The district goal is to provide opportunities for all students to be successful in their education and beyond, and to offer every student unique and diverse programs, from creative exploration to career pathways, dual enrollment and scholarship opportunities.
- In the [Lancaster Independent School District](#) (ISD), a suburban district in Texas, 70% of students are Black and 20% are Hispanic. In 2022, “despite last year's statewide trend of declining STAAR test results due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district has received a ‘B’ accountability rating” ([Bartholomew, 2022](#)). District ratings by the Texas Education Agency are determined by scores in three categories: student achievement, student progress, and closing the gaps. The overall district performance score is 88 (89 is often used as the highest overall rating scaled score), seven points higher than its 2019 rating.

## 5. Meaningful community engagement

“Family-school-community partnerships are a shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways, and families take initiative to actively support their children’s development and learning” ([National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, n.d.](#)). School leaders should increase awareness of how parents engage with their children’s schools. By increasing the knowledge, district leaders and educators can make greater efforts to meet parents’ needs and create more supportive learning environments for all students.

### Community partnerships

For the last decades, public schools have been gradually transformed into resource centers serving low-income, disadvantaged families. More than 20 million students receive free school breakfast; about 12 million students receive free lunches in school through the federal school meals program ([Hanson, 2023](#)). Many schools connect students and families to community resources, and through school-community partnerships, families have access to community-based programs (e.g., health care and human services).

In 2022, nearly half of all urban schools adopted a [community school model](#) or [wraparound programs](#) (Table 13). Among these schools, 93% of schools in towns, 88% of suburban schools, and 79% of city schools had community partners provide mental health care to students. Among city and suburban schools with wraparound programs, two-thirds partnered with their communities to provide nutrition and food assistance to students and their families for after-school and weekend meals.

- Among city schools with wraparound programs, at least 2 in 5 schools worked with community partners to offer students vision care (46%), dental care (44%), and physical health care (43%); more than 40% of schools helped families with social work, housing assistance, and parenting and family support.
- Among suburban schools that have adopted community school models, 45% worked with community partners to provide dental care to students; at least 2 in 5 schools offered students mentoring and tutoring programs.
- Among schools in towns that used community school models, schools often worked with community partners to provide students with dental care (40%), vision care (35%), social work (35%), parenting and family support (38%), mentoring and tutoring programs (33%), and migrant and refugee support (27%).



Table 13. Percentage of Public Schools Using Community Engagement Models and Providing Services with Community Partners, by Urban School Locale: August 2022

|   | All Public Schools | City | Suburban | Town |
|---|--------------------|------|----------|------|
| <b>Use a Community School or Wraparound Services Model</b>  | 45%                | 51%  | 42%      | 48%  |
| <b>Schools with a Community School or Wraparound Services Model Have Partnerships to Provide Students with:</b> |                    |      |          |      |
| Physical Health Care  | 35%                | 43%  | 34%      | 25%  |
| Mental Health Care  | 84%                | 79%  | 88%      | 93%  |
| Dental Care   | 41%                | 44%  | 45%      | 40%  |
| Vision Care   | 37%                | 46%  | 36%      | 35%  |
| Housing Assistance  | 32%                | 41%  | 31%      | 31%  |
| Nutrition/Food Assistance   | 60%                | 67%  | 65%      | 52%  |
| Employment Assistance   | 15%                | 20%  | 15%      | 12%  |
| Childcare   | 15%                | 18%  | 13%      | 14%  |
| Social Work   | 40%                | 47%  | 38%      | 35%  |
| Adult Education Classes   | 19%                | 24%  | 20%      | 11%  |
| Parenting and Family Support  | 41%                | 42%  | 43%      | 38%  |
| Mentoring and Tutoring Programs   | 36%                | 38%  | 41%      | 33%  |
| Migrant and Refugee Support   | 17%                | 16%  | 15%      | 27%  |
| Volunteering Opportunities  | 32%                | 33%  | 33%      | 30%  |
| Community Resource Fairs  | 26%                | 34%  | 29%      | 13%  |

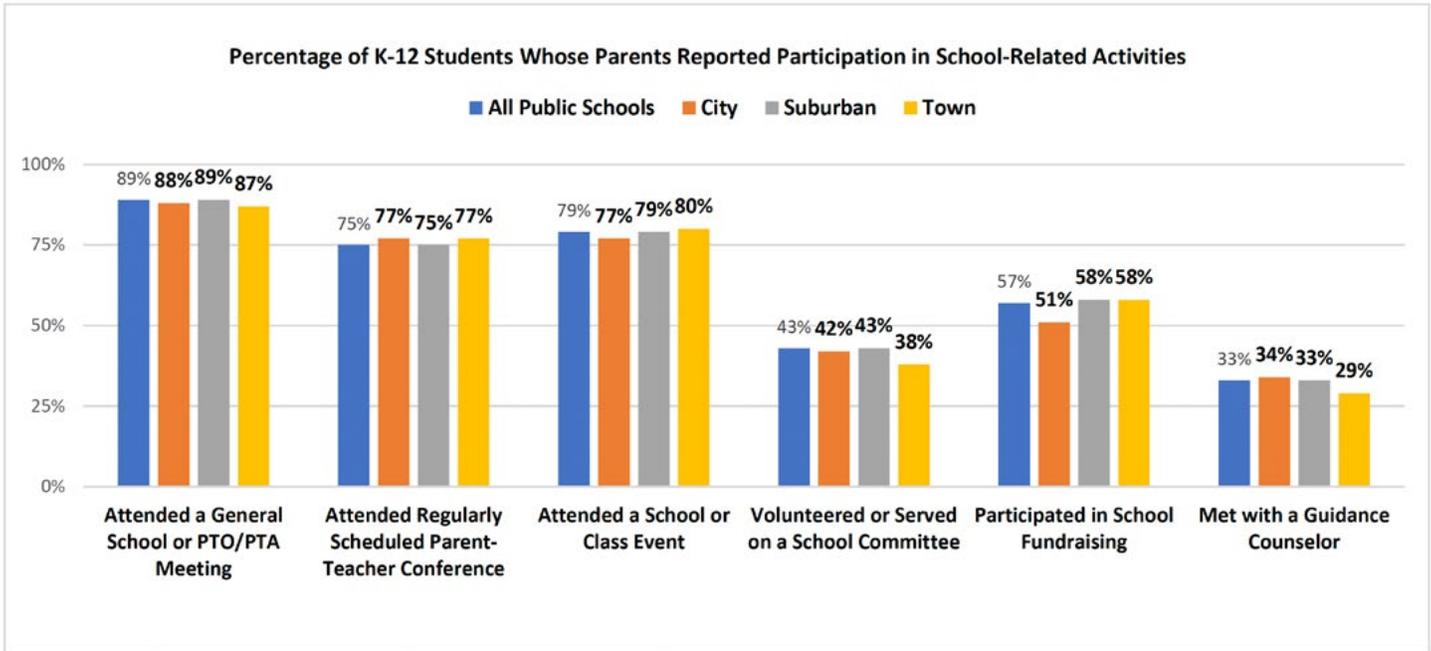
Source: [School Pulse Panel \(ed.gov\)](#)

## Parental engagement

Most parents get involved in their children’s schools through regular events, such as PTA meetings and scheduled parent-teacher conferences. Data show that most parents participate in general school meetings (e.g., PTO/PTA meetings), regularly scheduled parent-teacher meetings, and school or class events (Figure 28). More parents participated in school fundraising in suburban schools and schools in towns, compared with parents in urban schools.

Beyond parent involvement in routine school-family events, parents need to engage through the journey of their children’s education. However, Figure 28 shows that fewer parents volunteered or served on a school committee or met with a guidance counselor. For decades, school reforms have focused on course curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher training. “Yet these reforms have not accomplished as much as they might because academic achievement is shaped more by children’s lives outside the school walls, particularly their parents” ([Bogenschneide and Johnson, 2015](#)).

Figure 28. Percentage of Students Whose Parents Reported Participation in School-Related Activities, by Urban School Locale: 2018-19



Source: [Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2019](#)

Research suggests that parent engagement in their children’s education is more important for children growing up in disadvantaged, highly stressed families ([Barnett et al., 2020](#)). The following are some research-based [strategies](#) to engage families in school planning, leadership, and meaningful volunteer opportunities:

- Create roles for parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, properly training them for the areas in which they will serve (e.g., curriculum, budget, or school safety).
- Provide equal representation for parents on school governing bodies.
- Conduct a survey of parents to identify volunteer interests, talents, and availability, matching these resources to school programs and staff-support needs.
- Create volunteer recognition activities such as events, certificates, and thank-you cards.
- Establish a parent telephone tree to provide school information and encourage interaction among parents.
- Structure a network that links every family with a designated parent representative

In summary, policymakers interested in promoting school success through fostering safe and supportive school culture must look beyond the school doors.

## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 8: How School Districts Keep Parents on Board

### Parent Leads in Pomona Unified School District (California)

The Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) is an urban district in Los Angeles County with about 22,000 K-12 students. The district has 41 schools and serves a student population that is 87% Hispanic. Over 27% of students are English learners, and 88% are in poverty. For many families in Pomona, their children in school today will be the first to earn a high school diploma.

#### How Parent Leads Started

The [Parent Leads](#) program of PUSD started in 2008 to disseminate information about district and community resources and then have parents take what they learned back to their school sites to share with other parents. The program began with seven parents and now has more than 80 throughout the district attending each monthly session. Parent leaders have come from within the group. They not only attend the Parent Leads meetings, but also are readily available to assist with other matters that promote education.

#### The Role of Parent Leads

Parent Leads has since grown beyond its original mandate. The program encourages active engagement, builds the capacity of parents, and develops their leadership skills. Parent Leads has not only helped families to open educational opportunities for their children, but also has led to employment opportunities and educational avenues for the parents themselves.

Parents in the program are natural leaders at their own school sites, such as PTA or school site council members. Through Parent Leads, their roles are augmented by attending workshops on what their students are learning, how the educational system and community work, and how they can become advocates for their children.

#### Parent Leads and Parent Centers

Parents in the program act as recruiters, inviting other parents to participate as volunteers, PTA/PTO members, and parent representatives at school and district meetings. Through the active support of Parent Leads, the district now has Parent Centers throughout its school sites where families and the community are welcomed to engage in learning English, computer training, arts and crafts, yoga, salsa dancing, applying for a driver's license, as well as in educational and health workshops and other requested training.

- In the Parent Centers, families also have access to computers and learn how to monitor their students' academic growth and achievement online through the district portal.
- Parents learn about financial literacy and college scholarships available to their students. The Parent Leads program is there to explain the benefits of a college diploma and how the college-going experience works. They provide support to ensure that both families and students successfully transition into the college experience.

## **How Parent Leads Makes Parents' Voices Heard**

Parents interact not only with their school site but also make their voices heard throughout the district, speaking directly with site and district administrators and the school board. Parents in the program meet with community representatives, including city, state, and congressional representatives, to learn about health and social resources to support families in crisis. They also take this information back to their neighborhoods and friends. They become active partners in education and in the Pomona community.

## **How Parent Leads Engages Education Leaders**

Parent Leads meetings provide a forum on civic and district events. Speakers range from volunteers for various organizations to school board members, to district administrators, to Congressional representatives. Sometimes, former Superintendent Richard Martinez attended their meetings to explain how the district's community services work or why dual language Immersion in English/Spanish or English/Mandarin will help their children. There may be a discussion of upcoming workshops at school sites offering training in English, nutrition, and health services. After meetings, Parent Leads parents often go back to their schools and brainstorm with school leadership on how best to disseminate the information to ensure participation by all families.

## **How the School Board Supports Parent Leads**

Board members have prioritized this program. Every board member has attended Parent Leads meetings and works to ensure positive affiliations with parents. They also are accessible to hear parents' suggestions on how to best open the door to educational experiences for their children.

In summary, Parent Leads is a vital support for the district's programs. Parents are fully integrated partners with the district and community. Their recommendations are listened to and implemented. They contribute to the board's vision of education, and they are helping to shape opportunities for success for their students.

Source: [2022 Magna Awards: Grand Prize Winners \(nsba.org\)](https://www.nsba.org/2022-magna-awards-grand-prize-winners)

## Part III: What High-Quality Education for Every Student Means

In recent years, researchers have examined the relationship between grit and academic achievement in K-12 education. Grit means courage and resolve, or passion and perseverance toward a goal despite being confronted by significant obstacles and distractions. In a meta-analysis study, researchers ([Lam and Zhou, 2019](#)) reviewed and synthesized 44 relevant articles that involve empirical findings, a total of 60,133 participants. They found that overall grit level and its two facets (consistency of interest and perseverance of effort) are positively associated with academic achievement; compared with overall grit level and consistency of interest, perseverance of effort shows the largest effect on students' academic achievement.

In urban schools, many public school students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as poverty, neighborhoods with high crime rates, de facto racial segregation, and [dysfunctional families](#). These students need to develop the ability to overcome significant obstacles and distractions in their life and persevere with education goals ([Al-Mutawah and Fateel, 2018](#)). Research suggests that “grit, a skill that has been shown to be highly predictive of achievement, is malleable in childhood and can be fostered in the classroom environment” ([Allen et al., 2019](#)).

In summary, a high-quality education for every student should involve individualized learning experiences, personalized achievement plans, and the motivation to pursue their planned goals. To attain the objective, school leaders may consider adding the following elements to their education systems:

- Fostering educational resilience. Incorporating grit as an important noncognitive indicator for individual success and performance.
- Developing a positive and encouraging school culture or climate in which educators not only have high expectations for each student and facilitate every student to meet rigorous academic standards, but also have empathy and care for students and inspire students to pursue their dreams.
- Building rich and diverse school programs, including music and arts education, after-school activities, and college and career counseling programs.



## Policy/Practice Discussion Box 9: What High-Quality Education for Every Student Means

### An Unusual Journey: How Educators Can Support Every Student to Succeed

“My first day of class, I walked in and there was this little 5’1” Caucasian, curly blonde-haired lady. And I sit in my chair, and I throw my desk at her. And I tell her I will not be taught by a white woman. And instead of kicking me out of the class, like most teachers would do, and you’d be justified in doing so, she, instead took away my chair and said I could learn from the floor. And when I’m ready to not throw my desk at someone, I could have my desk and my chair back” ([Ryan Speedo Green, 2018](#)).

In 2018, [CBS’ “60 Minutes”](#) interviewed [Ryan Speedo Green](#) and recorded his story from juvenile delinquency to opera stardom. Green, a native of Suffolk, Virginia, had a rough childhood — living in a trailer park and later in a bullet-riddled house across the street from drug dealers. With a stressful and violent home life, Green became angry and violent. In fourth grade, he was expelled and sent to an institution for juvenile delinquents.

Green’s future did not end in fourth grade. As a teenager, he struggled with behavior and life problems, but he also discovered a passion and talent for music. At age 24, he entered a Metropolitan Opera competition for young singers and beat more than a thousand other contestants. At age 32, he became a member of the Vienna State Opera, performing on stages of the world in German, French, English, and Italian.

Green’s success should not be simplified as an outlier. Without the strong support of compassionate teachers, social workers, and mental health professionals, it would have been difficult for Green to have today’s immense accomplishments. It is true that Green has a sound gift — pun intended — that not every individual has, but his journey shows what a high-quality education for every student means.

#### ‘Don’t Let This Moment Define You’

When Green was in juvenile detention, the “little 5’1” Caucasian” elementary school teacher, Elizabeth Hughes, did not forget him. She called Green and told him, “Don’t let this moment define you. This doesn’t define you. You can be better. You can do better.” As an educator, Hughes did not give up on her student; instead of only teaching reading or math, she encouraged Green to pursue his life goals.

In research, “Don’t let this moment define you” is often described as educational resilience, the ability of children/adolescents to succeed in school despite exposure to personal and environmental adversities ([William and Portman, 2014](#)). Researchers find that “resilient students sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school and ultimately dropping out of school” ([Jowkar et al., 2014](#)). To provide a high-quality education for every student, schools should foster educational resilience, just like what Green’s teacher did for him.

## The Movement from Darkness to Light

In the detention center, Green's caseworker, Priscilla Piñeiro-Jenkins, played a significant role in his transformation. Green described, "despite all my anger, despite all my outbursts, she was still nice to me. I still remember that there was a person who was nice to me. A person who showed me kindness. And that's an amazing feeling to see that in darkness."

"Education is the movement from darkness to light," according to [Allan Bloom](#), an American philosopher. This movement should include the human touch. Green was moved by Piñeiro-Jenkins's kindness. The compassion of educators is often studied in the realm of teachers' empathic dispositions ([Berkovich, 2018](#)). "The discourse on ideal teachers and teaching has recognized the importance of empathy," according to Berkovich. Limited studies found that in schools having a positive and inspiring culture or climate, educators were often reported to care for their students, and be highly compassionate and supportive ([Barr, 2011](#); [Cooper, 2010](#); [Williams, 2010](#)). Researchers recommend that teacher educators provide training and field experiences that promote and enhance empathy and care in the classroom ([Boyer, 2010](#); [Motataianu, 2014](#); [Williams, 2010](#)).

## The Key to Unlocking the World

After the detention center, Green moved to another school and noticed that other students were involved in after-school activities. "From Latin club that I joined, to chorus that I joined, to football that I joined. And so, I had no time to argue with my mom because I was thinking about studying for a Latin quiz bowl, or I was in my room, playing with my keyboard trying to memorize music for my chorus concert the next day," Green said.

At age 15, a field trip brought Green to New York City and the Metropolitan Opera. When he witnessed that the lead character of the opera, the title role on the stage, was a person of color, it completely shattered his preconceptions of what he thought opera was. That day, he found a role model and his dream career.

[Oprah Winfrey](#) — a global media leader, philanthropist, producer and actress, and one of the most successful African American entrepreneurs — once said, "Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom." It is exactly the case of Green. Research suggests that extracurricular activities can play a central role in K-12 education; "Schools seeking to improve should make sure their extracurricular programming is incorporated into their strategic plan, not left on the sidelines" ([Lang, 2021](#)).

## Every Student Should Have a Roadmap to Success

Green told his voice teacher that he wanted to sing at the Metropolitan Opera one day. Instead of saying, 'No, you can't do that,' or 'Maybe you should aim a little lower,' his voice teacher gave him a must-do list. The list included graduating from high school, going to college for music, singing in foreign languages, and other steps to help him realize his dream. "60 Minutes" noted that Green "checked off the entire list, including bachelor's and master's degrees in music."

Green's voice teacher is a prime example of what school counseling programs should do. While the caliber of course selection strongly shapes the choices students have after they leave high school, few students are equipped to determine which combination of courses will best prepare them for success after graduation ([The Education Trust, 2011](#)). Research suggests that school counseling programs should and can help every student to develop competencies in academic achievement, personal and social development, and career planning ([Shaterloo and Mohammadyari, 2011](#)).

## What Does a High-Quality Education for Every Student Mean in Green's Case?

It is hard to define high-quality education for every student, but Green's experience shows that such education exists. Green was resilient; his teacher told him "Don't let the moment define you," and he determined to change his life from darkness to light. It was enrichment school programs that gave Green opportunities to explore his interest and pursue his passion for a postsecondary career.

The coda to Green's story was when he told his voice teacher about his "impossible" dream. Instead of discouraging a student by a perceived reality, his teacher gave him a checklist. Green not only checked off the entire list but also went above and beyond. Not ending his future in fourth grade, Green became a high achiever, thanks to an education approach that Socrates advocated 2,000 years ago: Education is "the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."

## Conclusions

About 39.1 million students, 80% of the U.S. student population, attend public schools in non-rural areas. Urban students are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. They speak hundreds of different languages at home. Many of them are from low-income families and new immigrant households. Their parents have high expectations and hope that their children will attain an excellent education that will ensure that they are college and career ready to reach their full potential.

It is difficult to describe the whole population of urban students. Every student is unique if we look at factors such as student demographics, family backgrounds, attending schools of different enrollment sizes, personal interests, attitudes, and expectations, among others. Geographically, more urbanized areas often have more resources and learning opportunities, e.g., a wide variety of in-school and after-school programs, more teachers with professional expertise, and fast internet connections at home. Unfortunately, not every urban student has access to those resources, and among those who do have access, not everyone takes advantage of those learning opportunities.

One big challenge for many urban schools is a lack of capacity to meet all students' needs. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds need bilingual education, gifted and talented programs, and vocational training, but state governments have not invested adequately for schools to develop programs in advanced education ([National Working Group on Advanced Education, 2023](#)). The EL student population has been expanding from suburban schools to schools in remote towns. In suburban districts, the number of students attending mid-high-poverty schools is rapidly growing. In towns, the number of students attending high-poverty schools has also increased; public schools, on average, only receive 5% of the state allocated money for special education.

In addition to funding challenges, urban school leaders have other serious concerns about educational equity, such as the shortage of effective educators and student mental health providers. The outcome of high-quality education for every student should be for all students to graduate with sound foundational academic skills and successfully transition to postsecondary education and careers. Yet, not every student has the same journey.

In Ryan Speedo Green's case, he had an unusual but encouraging journey. First, his teachers prevented him — an African American boy living in poverty, a high-crime neighborhood, and a very stressful family situation — from entering the school-to-prison pipeline. Second, equal access to good school programs helped him to find his interest, talent, passion, and dream career. Third, his educators did not discriminate against him; instead, they gave him a “compass,” a must-do list to fulfill his dream. More importantly, he invested himself in his future, and showed great determination to accomplish everything on the list and go above and beyond.

In conclusion, a main message from Green's story is that every student has the potential to learn, grow, and become a successful member of society. Equal access to effective educators and high-quality school programs are crucial for every student to thrive and are the responsibility of the educational system, but that is not enough; a key factor for their ultimate success is for students to take ownership of their learning journey ([National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2021](#)).

## Technical Notes

In this report, we used multiple data sources to conduct a comprehensive and thorough research review. Most data are selected from the recently published tables prepared by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), federal reports published by the Census Bureau and other agencies, as well as some academic research papers. We provide links to data sources for readers who are interested in the methodology of our data collection and estimation.

While data used in this study are from reliable sources, our research has limitations. First, in the section “How to Define Urban,” we explain how federal agencies define school locations. We intentionally present data of City, Suburban, and Town separately, instead of aggregating an urban category. By doing so, we believe that readers will have a better understanding that, in some issues, schools in towns are more aligned with rural schools, while in other issues, schools in towns are more aligned with city schools. It is a fact that schools in small, remote towns are often on the edge of being urban and rural, and the shared challenges experienced by certain districts often determine the perceptions of people who live in those places. We try to clarify different concepts about urban when we cite research data that pool “City” and “Suburban” data together for urban and “Town” and “Rural” for rural.

Second, in many parts of our study, we report both the count of students and the percentage of students by group. When comparing populations that have a large difference in size, reporting percentages or counts only can lead to ambiguous and even misleading interpretations. For example, a 0.3% increase in students with disabilities can represent more than 20,000 students; a 0.8% increase in English language learners means more than half a million students. Both percentages and discrete counts (figures) matter.

Lastly, while we use different algorithms when searching qualitative data and citing various examples in our study, it does not necessarily mean that we endorse the product, researcher, or organization cited. The views of cited research do not necessarily represent our views. Our purpose in this study is to provide a wide range of data and information for readers to think about and consider. We encourage our readers to practice their own sound judgment when examining and using the information we provide in the study.



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## About CPE

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) believes that accurate, objective information is essential to building support for public schools and creating effective programs to prepare all students for success. As NSBA's research branch, the Center for Public Education (CPE) provides objective and timely information about public education and its importance to the well-being of our nation. Launched in 2006, CPE emerged from discussions between NSBA and its member state school boards associations about how to inform the public about the successes and challenges of public education. To serve a wide range of audiences, including parents, teachers, and school leaders, CPE offers research, data, and analysis on current education issues and explores ways to improve student achievement and engage support for public schools.

## About NSBA

Founded in 1940, the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) purpose is to ensure each student everywhere has access to excellent and equitable public education governed by high-performing school board leaders and supported by the community.

With members spread across the United States, the Virgin Islands, and Canada, NSBA is the only national organization representing school boards. Along with its member state associations and member public school districts representing locally elected school board officials serving millions of public school students, NSBA believes that public education is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people and that each child, regardless of their ability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, identity, or citizenship, deserves equitable access to an education that maximizes their individual potential.

For more information, visit [nsba.org](https://www.nsba.org).

