



WHY 
rural
MATTERS

2023

Centering Equity and Opportunity

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NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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



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Executive Summary

While the entire United States is still reeling in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recovery process has not been even across communities. Many rural communities—especially certain pockets—are currently facing multiple crises in terms of educational loss, economic outcomes, unemployment, and mental health. Any issue that impacts rural families and communities extends inevitably to rural children, and so this larger picture signals the importance of including in educational discourse all aspects of a student’s mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Attentive to these realities, this report looks critically at how educational supports and resources for student well-being are being distributed, casting light on which of our rural children are most in need of additional support.

Why Rural Matters 2023, the latest in a series of 10 such reports, shows that roughly 7.3 million public school students are enrolled in rural school districts—more than one in every seven students across the United States. Nearly one in seven of those rural students experience poverty, one in 15 lacks health insurance, and one in ten has changed residence in the previous 12 months.

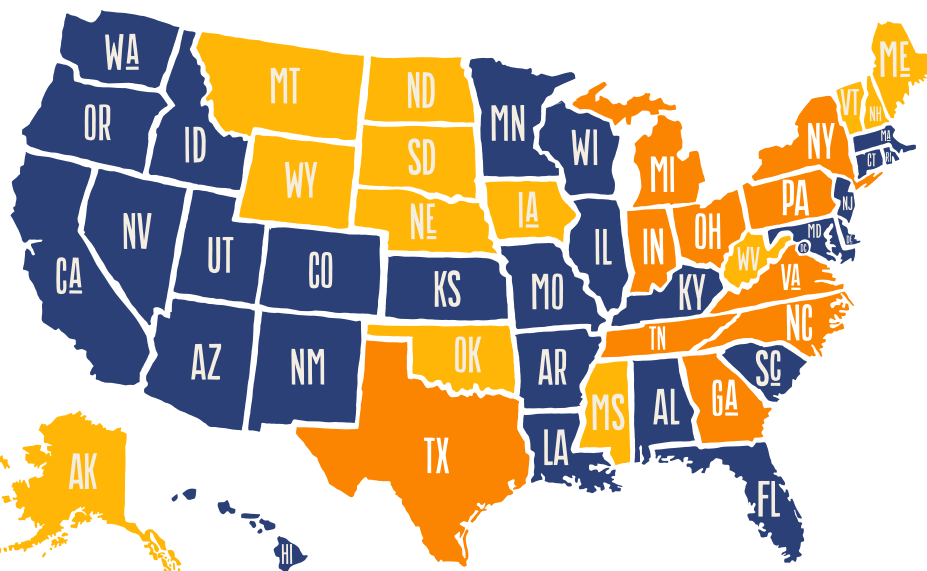
Significantly, the number of children attending rural schools is greater than the number of students in rural school districts because many children attend rural schools in districts that are not designated “rural” by the National Center for Education Statistics. Hence, a more representative measure of rural students in the United States is over 9.5 million—more than one in five students in the United States. This means that more students in the United States attend rural schools than attend the 100 largest U.S. school districts combined.

Data used in *Why Rural Matters 2023* come from public sources: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Census Bureau. For this report, rural is defined using the three rural locale codes as determined by the National Center for Education Statistics. (See main report for more details.) There is no single “best” definition of rural, but the National Center for Education Statistics coding is widely used in public data reporting and therefore represents the most practical means of operationalizing “rural.”

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

More students in the United States attend rural schools than attend the 100 largest U.S. school districts combined.

Many rural school districts across the United States are small: median enrollment for U.S. rural districts is 493 students, and at least half of rural districts in 23 states enroll less than 493 students. In Montana and North Dakota, at least 85% of rural districts have fewer than 493 students. West Virginia, where most public schools are rural, has no small rural school districts because all 55 districts are countywide systems. Florida, Maryland, and Delaware also have no small rural school districts.



Roughly half of all rural students in the United States attend school in just 10 states, including some of the most populous, metropolitan states.

In 13 states, at least half of public schools are rural. In 14 other states, at least one-third of all schools are rural.

More Key Findings

from this Edition of *Why Rural Matters*



MORE ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS IS NEEDED

In non-rural districts, an average of 295 students are given access to only a single school counselor or psychologist. This ratio is worse in rural districts, averaging 310:1, with seven states having ratios worse than 400:1 (Minnesota, California, Mississippi, Alaska, Louisiana, Indiana, and Michigan). Rural Michigan children bear the most critical ratio of an average of 574 students to every psychologist or school counselor.

MOST RURAL GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS DEMONSTRATE GENDER EQUITY IN GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Across the United States, 50.4% of the students in gifted programs in rural districts were female.¹ This is a coarse measure of equity since giftedness manifests itself in different subject areas and in types of accommodations. Such variation may reveal more work yet needed to achieve equitable accommodation in gifted programs. For instance, females are heavily underrepresented in rural gifted math programs as well as in math competitions (globally). In three states, females' participation in rural school gifted programs is at least eight percentage points lower than that of males: Alaska (40.0% vs. 60.0%), New Hampshire (45.4% vs. 54.6%), and Wyoming (45.7% vs. 54.3%). Rural Rhode Island has the highest percent of females in their gifted and talented programs at 62.4%. More pressing than gender equity in rural placement was the absence of gifted and talented programs altogether. Of the 24,736 public rural schools in the United States, 10,071 (40.7%) appear not to offer any program specific to gifted students.



MORE GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM ACCESS IS NEEDED FOR BLACK AND HISPANIC STUDENTS IN RURAL DISTRICTS

Despite 17.1% of students in rural schools identifying as Hispanic, only 9.1% of the students in the gifted programs at these same schools were Hispanic. Similarly, 10.6% of the rural school population identified as Black, but only 5.2% of the gifted student population in rural schools was Black. In contrast, 64.8% of rural students were White, but 77.4% of the rural students enrolled in gifted programs were White. Gifted enrollment rates for all other racial and ethnic categories were roughly proportionate to their numbers in the overall rural population.





RURAL AREAS APPEAR TO OFFSET SOME OF THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Although rural students experiencing poverty scored lower than their peers in every state with data on both math and reading tests, these differences were smaller among rural schools than among non-rural schools. Across all locales, students experiencing poverty scored 27 points lower than their peers on the grade 8 NAEP math assessment and 22 points lower on the reading assessment; in rural schools, these differences were 22 and 18, respectively. Socioeconomic equity in reading appeared to be highest within rural schools in Arizona, Idaho, Texas, and Oklahoma and most concerning in Illinois, Mississippi, and Virginia. For math, the most equitable states were Hawaii, Arizona, West Virginia, and Oklahoma; the least equitable states were Colorado and Louisiana.

MANY RURAL AREAS CONTINUE TO LACK BASIC INTERNET ACCESS

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that adequate internet connectivity is an essential component of equitable education opportunities. This connectivity has remained essential even after most students have returned to in-person classrooms. However, 13.4% of rural households lack minimum broadband connection for streaming educational videos or virtual classrooms. In six states, more than one in six rural households lacks at least a basic broadband connection: New Mexico (21.4%), Mississippi (20.6%), Alabama (18.9%), West Virginia (17.5%), Arkansas (17.4%), and Louisiana (17.2%). While this is not a uniquely rural disparity, it is several percentage points higher than the percent of households without broadband access in rural and non-rural areas combined (9.9%).



STUDENTS IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL THAN THEIR NON-RURAL COUNTERPARTS

In the majority of states with enough rural students to make data available, (34 of 46 states), rural students graduated at rates higher than their non-rural peers. Despite facing a range of spatial inequities, the unique strengths of rural communities combined to create graduation advantages of at least five percentage points in six states (Nebraska, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island). However, there were also exceptions—in two states, the rural graduation rate was more than 3 percentage points lower than the non-rural graduation rate—Arizona (7.7 percentage points lower) and Alaska (10.6 percentage points lower). To put this in perspective, if Alaska's rural students had graduated at the same rate as its non-rural students, an additional 200 to 250 rural students would have graduated in the past year instead of leaving the public school system without a diploma.

Many states provided a disproportionately larger share of school funding for rural districts because of the higher relative costs of running rural schools. Fourteen states, however, provided disproportionately less funding to rural districts: Nebraska had the greatest disparity, followed by Vermont, Rhode Island, Iowa, Delaware, South Dakota, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. Although this disparity has been present in several of these states for years, it is a recent development for Delaware, South Dakota, Indiana, Idaho, and Illinois.

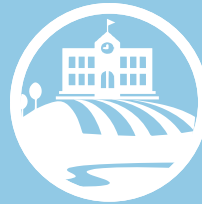
Rural school districts in Delaware, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Nevada are the four most racially diverse in the United States, as per our Rural Diversity Index. In each of these states, two students chosen at random from a school in a rural district are more likely than not to be of a different race or ethnicity.

Across the United States, the communities surrounding schools in rural districts on average had a household income of 2.91 times the poverty line. Rates were lowest in New Mexico (1.85) and highest in Connecticut (5.32).



Rural Education in the 50 States

This report uses five gauges to describe the condition of rural education in each state:



1. Importance of rural education



2. Diversity of rural students and their families



3. Educational Policy Context impacting rural schools and communities



4. Educational Outcomes for rural students



5. Access to Supports for Learning and Development of students in rural schools

Each gauge includes five equally weighted indicators. The higher the ranking of a state, the more important or urgent rural education matters are for that state. We combine the five average gauge rankings to determine an overall average ranking, which is the Rural Education Priority ranking.

Our state rankings should not be interpreted to suggest that rural education in low-priority states does not deserve increased attention from policymakers. Every state faces challenges in providing a high-quality education for all children. Highest-priority states in this report are those states where key factors converge to present the most extreme challenges for rural schooling, suggesting the most urgent and comprehensive needs for policymakers' attention.

There are many faces of rural: from remote Indigenous reservations in the West, to small towns in the Great Plains and Midwest, to the Mississippi Delta and Southern "Black Belt," to Appalachia and New England. Rural can look different in each state: a town of a few thousand people, or tiny communities located several hours or even days from the nearest city, as is the case in parts of Alaska. This report looks at statewide averages, which sometimes mask important variations in rural contexts and conditions. No state should ignore the important issues facing rural students, their schools, and communities.

Meeting the needs of nearly 10 million children is a challenge and an obligation that demands and deserves collective attention across the United States. Fulfilling that obligation requires educators, policymakers, caregivers, students, citizens, and employers to deepen our understanding of rural education issues and to move beyond simplistic and often harmful notions about rural schools and their communities.

While *Why Rural Matters* uses data to draw attention to key areas of need in rural education, it is motivated by a strong sense of optimism that change is possible and that examples of creative and successful efforts to

address issues confronting rural education may serve as inspiration for paths forward.

After years of measuring racial diversity through the inadequate lens of "White and non-White," we continue our use of the rural diversity index begun in the previous *Why Rural Matters* report. This index shows that when randomly choosing two students from a school in a rural district in the United States, there would be about a one-in-three chance that the students would identify as being from different racial/ethnic backgrounds.ⁱⁱ The most recent statistics describing that likelihood is 33.4%, up from 31.9% in the 2019 report, underscoring the steadily diversifying landscape of the rural United States.

Defying traditional stereotypes that only densely populated, metropolitan areas of the United States are racially diverse, and that the rural United States is mostly White, the rural diversity index of 33.4% is not far below the U.S. all-locale diversity index of 45.9%. In fact, in 10 states, the rural diversity index is higher than the U.S. average for all locales:

- Delaware (61.3%)
- Oklahoma (55.5%)
- North Carolina (52.7%)
- Nevada (51.7%)
- Maryland (49.1%)
- Florida (48.8%)
- Georgia (48.5%)
- Arizona (47.6%)
- South Carolina (47.0%)
- Texas (46.7%)

The non-rural district of Idabel, Oklahoma boasts the most racially diverse district in the United States of any locale (78.2%), but the small rural district of Preston, Oklahoma less than 3 hours away has almost the same diversity level at 76.1%.

Key Changes

in This Edition of *Why Rural Matters*

In *Why Rural Matters 2023*, we maintain many of our yearly updates from the most recent edition of *Why Rural Matters* (such as the diversity index, adjusting teacher salaries to reflect local wages, and our updated two-fold method to measuring poverty). In addition, the *Educational Outcomes* gauge has been reworked to better reveal areas of strength and opportunities for pursuing equity. The spotlight on equity now includes physical, mental, and emotional health, as well as spatial equity, in our entirely new *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge.

Why Rural Matters 2023 also includes sections investigating the impact of COVID-19 on rural areas and discussing the National Rural Education Association's (NREA) latest rural research agenda. These sections are intended to start conversations and agenda-setting around major challenges and initiatives. Rural areas were hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is up to educators, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers to respond proactively in these crucial next years. The NREA rural research agenda is one part of that response.

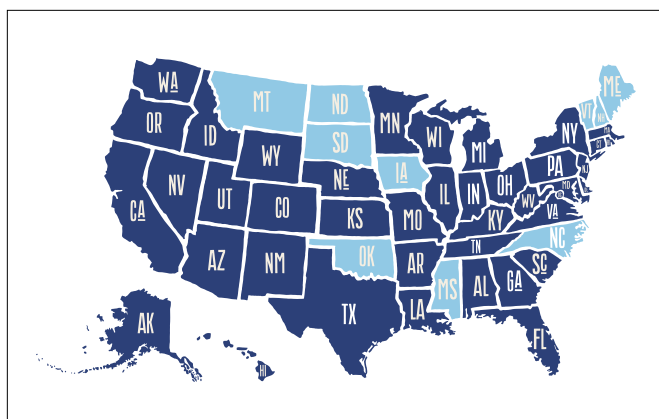


Highlights

from *Why Rural Matters*' Five Gauges



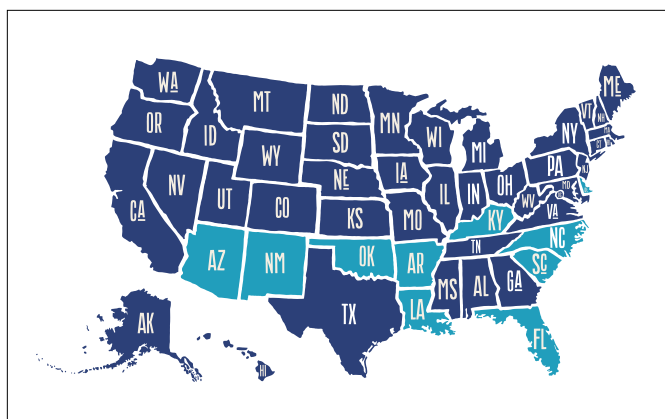
IMPORTANCE OF RURAL EDUCATION IN THE STATE



The 10 highest-priority states on this gauge that examines the prevalence of rural schools and districts in a state and related measures are **Maine, South Dakota, Oklahoma, Vermont, Montana, North Dakota, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Hampshire, and Iowa**. There are no major ranking changes for states since the last report. The two biggest increases in priority were Arkansas (from 16th to 12th) and West Virginia (from 19th to 14th). In Arkansas, the overall student enrollment increased, especially in rural districts. In West Virginia, the overall student enrollment decreased, but this decrease was more pronounced in non-rural districts than in rural districts. While Texas, Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, and Michigan all rank at or below the median on this gauge, these states have sizeable numbers of rural students that are dwarfed by very large numbers of urban and suburban students, affecting the overall priority ranking of those states.



STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY



The highest-priority states on this gauge are **Arizona, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Arkansas.**

This list of highest-priority states looks similar to four years ago (on the same set of indicators), with exception that Delaware was not previously on the list. Already the most racially diverse state in the United States, Delaware grew even more diverse and saw its child poverty rate increase by 50%.

In West Virginia, the least diverse state, there is only a one in eight chance that two randomly-selected students who attend school together in a rural district are of a different race or ethnicity. Compare this to Delaware, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Nevada where two such students are more likely than not to be of different races or ethnicities.

Across the United States, 141 public school districts enroll only students of a single racial or ethnic category (i.e., a diversity index of 0%). Of these, nine enroll only students of American Indian or Alaskan Native background and two enroll only students of Hispanic background. All but three of these districts are rural.

The communities around schools in rural U.S. districts have an average household income that's 2.91 times that of the poverty level, up from 2.68 four years earlier. The communities with the highest concentrations of people who live with incomes below the federal poverty line are in New Mexico (only 1.85 times the poverty level), while the wealthiest ones are in Connecticut (5.32 times the poverty level). There are 18 states with average rural-school community incomes less than half that of Connecticut's.

In a sizable jump from the past, every state now offers an Individualized Education Plan for at least one in nine of their rural students. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, more than one in five rural students receive special education services.

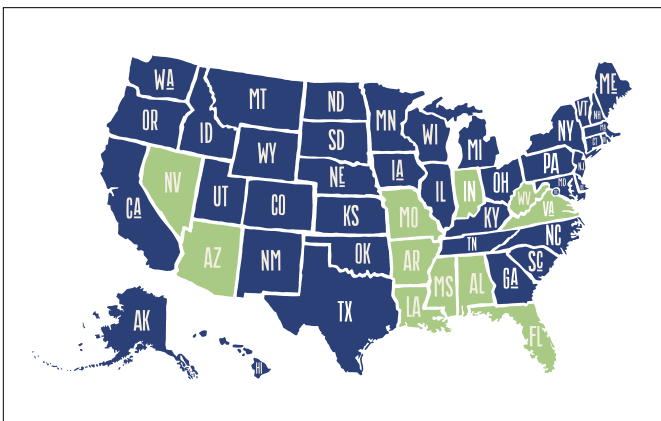
Moving residences causes transitions that can be stressful and disruptive for students, teachers, and classmates. Of the 10 states with the highest rates of rural student mobility, four also rank among the most urgent on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge (Arizona, South Carolina, Nevada, and Alabama). With the fourth highest level of rural student mobility, Wyoming also ranks in the highest quartile for rural poverty difference in both math and reading. Florida experienced the highest rates of student mobility, with over one in seven rural students changing residences in the past year.

Of note, one of our past measures of rural diversity, the percentage of rural English Learners/Multilingual Learners, was not included in the indicator and gauge rankings due to data issues. Results are however reported in a follow-up section (see page 146).

Because Hawaii is a single (non-rural) district, it is absent from most of our indicators. However, the fact that its rural child poverty rate is the third highest in the country (22.2%) suggests needed attention for students living in rural areas throughout the state. The only states with higher rural child poverty rates are Kentucky (22.6%) and New Mexico (24.4%).



EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT



The 11 states that most urgently need education policy changes to address rural schools' and students' needs are: **Indiana, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, Arizona, Alabama, Louisiana, Virginia, West Virginia, and Nevada and Arkansas (tied for 10th).**

The lowest-priority states on this gauge are found in nearly all regions of the United States: three in the Great Plains (Wyoming, Nebraska, and Kansas), one in the Midwest (Minnesota), three in the Northeast (Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York), two Western states (Washington and California), one in the Southwest (New Mexico), and Delaware and Alaska. Many of these states are characterized by small schools and districts and have stronger investments in public education overall.

Though most states have stayed fairly consistent on this gauge, Nevada jumped in priority from 29th to 10th. Not only have their teacher salaries and instructional expenditures on student learning not kept pace with average increases across the United States, but transportation costs also consume larger portions of their budgets. On the other hand, Ohio increased average investments in each rural pupil by over \$1,000 and saw their education policy rank shift from seventh to 21st.

Non-rural districts across the United States spend an average of \$7,685 on the teaching and learning of each student. This figure is over \$500 more than the amount spent on the instruction of each rural student. New York's rural students are supported at an average rate of \$14,731 per student, more than twice that of the average rural instructional expenditures in 27 states. The lowest averages are: \$4,908 in Idaho, \$5,278 in Mississippi, \$5,484 in Florida, \$5,566 in Alabama, and \$5,582 in Indiana.

Rural student transportation costs are high, with an average of \$11.09 spent on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation. Compare this with non-rural districts that spend \$14.93 on instruction for every dollar on transportation. States where the largest portion of the budget is consumed by transportation costs are West Virginia, Nevada, Indiana, and Louisiana. A low ratio indicates that transportation costs are disproportionately burdensome relative to instructional costs.

States supply \$1.18 on average to rural districts for every dollar allocated from local tax revenue. Rural districts in Nebraska receive only 28 cents of state funding for every dollar of local revenue they raise. States located near each other can have very different funding structures. For example, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire are the next three lowest after Nebraska, with none of them receiving more than 50 cents in state funding per local dollar. However, the rural districts of nearby Vermont receive

over 30 times more at \$15.30 from the state for every local dollar—the highest rate in the United States.

Alarming, in the past four years since the last *Why Rural Matters* report, the state-to-local funding proportions for rural districts have decreased in 27 states, creating more dependency on more inequitable local funding. New Mexico has seen the greatest drop (\$3.34, down from \$4.42 per local dollar). Other states with substantial decreases include North Carolina, North Dakota, Alaska, Kansas, and Wyoming.

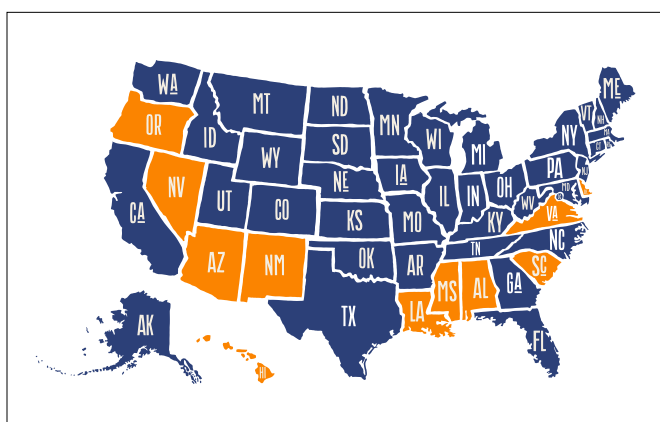
The adjusted U.S. average salary for teachers in rural districts is \$76,374—a promising jump from the \$69,797 four years prior, but still substantially lower than the \$81,645 average for non-rural districts even after adjusting for local wage differences. Many rural districts cannot keep pace with larger districts on salaries, even though they sometimes serve high numbers of students experiencing poverty. These salary differences make it harder to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in rural districts.

Even when adjusted for local wage differences in other occupations, average spending on educators' salaries in rural districts varies widely: Arkansas has the lowest U.S. average of \$50,848, and New York the highest at \$109,665. States with the lowest average salaries for rural educators: Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, Colorado, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Kansas, Illinois, South Carolina, South Dakota, Indiana, and Texas.

The states with the highest average rural educator salaries are New York, Alaska, Washington, California, and Massachusetts.



EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES



The 11 highest-priority states on this gauge: **New Mexico, South Carolina, Oregon, Louisiana, Virginia, Delaware, Alabama, Arizona, Hawaii, and Nevada and Mississippi (tied for 10th).**

Despite having the third highest rate of rural child poverty, on their eighth-grade math scores Hawaii's rural students who experience poverty scored the closest to their rural peers who do not experience poverty. Unfortunately, both groups scored low, giving Hawaii the second lowest math composite (fourth and eighth grade) scores, finishing only behind New Mexico.

Poverty levels in rural school communities and the percent of school-aged children experiencing poverty are both highly correlated with unfavorable NAEP outcomes in both math and reading (all four state-level correlations are between $r = .65$ and $r = .80$).

States with the largest rural poverty differences in

math scores were Louisiana, Colorado, South Carolina, Delaware, Tennessee, Kansas, Wyoming, Virginia, South Dakota, and Montana. These states all had a difference at least three times that of Hawaii's.

Interestingly, large math test score differences between rural students experiencing poverty and their wealthier rural peers did not necessarily coincide with large reading test score differences. In fact, only Virginia was in the top 10 largest differences in both math and reading. Arkansas, Oklahoma, and West Virginia were among the 10 smallest differences in both math and reading, although all three of these states also fell below the U.S. mean for all rural students in both math and reading test scores.

NAEP reading scores were especially sensitive to educational policy contexts. Six of the ten states with the largest reading differences received the highest-priority rating on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge: Illinois, Mississippi, Virginia, Nevada, Arizona, and Indiana. In math, the link was weaker. Only two of the ten states with the largest rural poverty differences had a crucial rating on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge (Louisiana and Virginia). These results, especially in reading, underscore the importance of attending to school/district size and equitable funding for students and teachers in rural areas.

Four of the lowest-performing five states in math were also among the lowest-performing five states in reading: New Mexico, Hawaii, West Virginia, and Alabama. Mississippi, our highest-priority state of the report and a state which often has some of the lowest educational outcomes, was not among the lowest-performing 10 states in either math or reading.

Rural students graduate high school at a higher rate (89.8%) than their non-rural peers (87.2%). At the state level, 35 of the 46 states on which data are available have a higher graduation rate for rural students than for non-rural students.

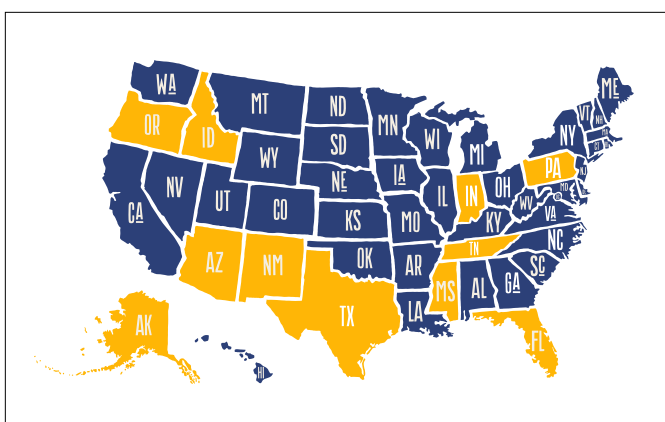
States with the highest rural graduation rate advantage tend to have fairly small rural student populations. In terms of percentage point differences, Nebraska has the largest at 6.4, followed by Connecticut (6.1), Maryland (5.9), and Massachusetts (5.8). Some large states, such as New York (5.6), Georgia (4.2), and Pennsylvania (3.9) also have relatively high percentage point differences.

In 11 states, rural students graduate at a lower rate than their non-rural peers. This difference is over 2 percentage points in five states: Alaska (10.6), Arizona (7.7), Nevada (3.0), South Carolina (2.2), and Utah (2.2).





**ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING
AND DEVELOPMENT**



The highest-priority states on this gauge are: **Arizona, Idaho, Indiana, Alaska, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas and Oregon (tied for tenth).**

New Mexico and Mississippi are the least connected states, each having more than one in five rural households without access to basic broadband internet. This contrasts with states like Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Jersey where only about one in 20 rural households lack broadband access.

In Massachusetts, only 1.1% of school-aged rural children are not covered by health insurance. The lack of coverage is over 10 times as high in Arizona (11.8%), Texas (13.5%), and Wyoming (13.95%).

Of the 10 states with the highest rates of uninsured school-aged rural children, only one (Arizona) also ranked in the 10 states with the highest percentage of rural children experiencing poverty.

In rural Oregon, only one in nine preschool-aged children attend public preschool, where high quality teacher and curricular standards can be regulated and where preschool is offered without additional cost to the family. In the rural areas of Wyoming, Iowa, Vermont, and Nebraska, more than one-half of preschool-aged children attend public preschool.

In non-rural districts, 295 students are given access to only a single school counselor or psychologist, on average. This ratio is worse in rural districts (an average of 310:1), and seven states have ratios worse than 400:1 (Minnesota, California, Mississippi, Alaska, Louisiana, Indiana, and Michigan). Michigan has the most critical ratio of students to school counselors or mental health professionals (574:1).

Females are underrepresented in rural gifted and talented programs in a handful of states (such as Alaska, New Hampshire, and Wyoming). Although the gender representation in these programs is more balanced when looking at rural schools across the United States, there is evidence of racial inequities in program participation. Despite 17.1% of students in rural schools identifying as Hispanic, only 9.1% of the students in the gifted programs at these same schools are Hispanic. Similarly, 10.6% of the rural school population identify as Black, but only 5.2% of the gifted student population in rural schools are Black. In contrast, 64.8% of rural students are White, but 77.4% of the students enrolled in gifted programs are White. Gifted enrollment rates for all other racial and ethnic categories are roughly proportionate to their numbers in the overall rural population.

Introduction

Why Rural Matters 2023 is the 10th in a series of reports analyzing the contexts and conditions of rural education in each of the 50 states and calling attention to the need for policymakers to address rural education issues in their respective states.

While it is the 10th in a series, this report is not simply an updating of data from earlier editions. This report comes in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted the rural United States in many and varied ways that we are only beginning to understand. Where does rural education currently stand, and where should we focus efforts on improving it? What subpopulations in rural areas should policymakers and educators pay closer attention to? Considering questions such as these, *Why Rural Matters 2023* includes new indicators related to well-being and equity, and two special topic sections on the impact of COVID-19 on rural areas and alignment of the report with the rural research agenda recently released by the National Rural Education Association. The analyses and data presented can inform policy discussions on these and other important issues as they manifest in rural settings. The report also includes examples from states that have shown notable positive changes over time in terms of policy measures linked to desirable outcomes for rural students—i.e., states that demonstrate a marked improvement in specific elements of their policy contexts.

As in previous reports, we have deliberately altered the statistical indicators and gauges to call attention to the variability and complexity of rural education with an eye toward its most important issues. The intent is not to compare states in terms of their differing rates of progress toward an arbitrary goal. Rather, the intent is (1) to provide information and analyses that prioritize policy needs of rural public schools and the communities they serve, and (2) to describe the complexity of rural contexts to give policymakers a

more complete picture of challenges faced by their constituencies so that they might formulate policies that are responsive to those challenges.

In 2021-22, the school year corresponding to much of the data used in this report, 7,305,670 public school students were enrolled in rural school districts (the unit of analysis for most of the indicators used in the report).^[xxxviii] That is just over 15% of the total public-school enrollment in the United States. However, this number does not include students who attend a rural school within a district that is designated as non-rural. In the same school year, a total of 9,513,696 students (20.7%) attended a rural school (i.e., a school designated as rural, whether in a rural or non-rural district). Meeting the needs of nearly 10 million children is a collective challenge and a moral obligation deserving attention. Rural issues are complex issues requiring multiple perspectives to shape deep and accurate understandings to work together with rural schools and their communities to ensure all students succeed.

The Data

The data used for *Why Rural Matters 2023* were compiled from information collected and maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Census Bureau. All data used here are available to the general public and may be downloaded directly from the sources above for further inspection and analysis. For this report, rural is defined using the 12-item, NCES locale code system. Rural schools and districts used in this report are those designated with locale codes 41 (rural fringe), 42 (rural distant), or 43 (rural remote). Versions of *Why Rural Matters* prior to the 2009 version used a combination of school-level and district-level data. Improvements in the locale code system (specifically, assigning district-level locale based upon the locale where the plurality of students in the district attend school) now make it

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

Why Rural Matters 2023 includes two feature sections that investigate timely topics as they pertain to rural areas: the impact of COVID-19 on rural education and an alignment of this report with the five-year rural research agenda of the National Rural Education Association (NREA). Although research on the impact of COVID-19 on the education of our children is only beginning to emerge, the first feature section summarizes some general trends and tentative findings. The impact of COVID-19 has not been equitable—certain groups of children, households, and educators have suffered disproportionately. Some of these inequities are also evident in the data presented in the current report. With the most recent data being used for every indicator, 18 of the 25 indicators include results related to at least some of the pandemic’s impact. The second feature section takes a gauge-by-gauge look at how the data presented in this report aligns with NREA’s Rural Research Agenda,ⁱⁱⁱ as well as providing some additional information pertaining to the agenda.

Why Rural Matters 2023 uses data reported only by regular public education agencies defined as local school districts and local school district components of supervisory unions. We exclude charter school-only districts and specialized state- and federally-directed education agencies focused primarily on vocational, special, or alternative education.

Gauging Rural Education

in the 50 States

The report uses five gauges to describe the condition of rural education in each state: (1) the Importance of rural education, (2) the Diversity of rural students and their families, (3) the Educational Policy Context impacting rural schools and facing rural communities across the United States, (4) the Educational Outcomes of rural students, and (5) the Access to Supports for Learning and Development of students in rural schools in each state. Each gauge includes five equally weighted indicators, for a total of 25 indicators. Instances where data were not available are denoted with “NA.”

The higher the ranking on a gauge, the more important or urgent rural education matters are for that particular state. The gauges and their component indicators are:



IMPORTANCE GAUGE

- Percent rural schools
- Percent small rural school districts
- Percent rural students
- Number of rural students
- Percent of state education funds to rural districts



STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY GAUGE

- Rural diversity index
- Poverty level in rural school communities
- Percent rural students with IEP (Individualized Education Plan)
- Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty
- Percent rural household mobility



EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE

- Rural instructional expenditures per pupil
- Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures
- Median organizational scale
- State revenue to schools per local dollar
- Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE (Full-Time Equivalent)



EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE

- Rural NAEP poverty difference in math (Grade 8)
- Rural NAEP poverty difference in reading (Grade 8)
- Overall rural NAEP performance in math (Grades 4 and 8)
- Overall rural NAEP performance in reading (Grades 4 and 8)
- Rural advantage for high school graduation rate



ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT GAUGE

- Students per psychologist or school counselor
- Percent of rural households without broadband access
- Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage
- Percent rural enrollment in public preschool
- Percent of rural students in gifted programs who are female

Some, but not all, of the indicators used in this report are the same as in previous versions. Because many of the indicators have changed or have been replaced completely, year-by-year comparisons of state rankings are potentially misleading. The possibilities for assembling indicators to describe the context, conditions, and outcomes of rural schools and communities are virtually unlimited. We acknowledge the complexity of the rural United States generally and of 50 individual state systems of public education, and we recognize that perspectives offered by the indicators used here represent only one of many good ways of understanding rural education in the United States.

For each of the five gauges, we added the state rankings on each indicator and then divided by the number of indicators to produce an average gauge ranking. Using that gauge ranking, we organized the states into quartiles that describe their relative position with regard to other states on that particular gauge. For the Importance and *Educational Policy Context* gauges, the four quartiles are labeled “Notable,” “Important,” “Very Important,” and “Crucial.” For the *Student and Family Diversity, Access to Supports for Learning and Development*, and *Educational Outcomes* gauges, the four quartiles are labeled “Fair,” “Serious,” “Critical,” and “Urgent.” To help identify and quantify relationships between and among indicators, we also conducted bivariate correlation analyses for the indicators within each gauge.

Finally, we combined the five average gauge rankings to determine an overall average ranking, which we term the *Rural Education Priority* ranking.

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

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

Consider rural Ohio, for instance. With a diversity index of 16.8%, the state ranked 44th in terms of racial diversity. However, Ohio’s rural district of Licking Heights had a diversity index of 68.0%. Compare this to the state of Delaware – despite having the highest level of rural racial diversity among states, its index of 61.3% was still less than that of Licking Heights. Or take Arkansas, which had the lowest adjusted teacher salary among rural districts of any state in the United States at \$50,848. This was less than half the adjusted teacher salary of \$109,665 for rural districts in New York (the highest-paying state). This conceals the fact that Arkansas’s rural district of Lake Hamilton offered an adjusted average teacher salary of \$74,587 while New York’s rural district of Putnam Central paid only \$69,094. It is our hope in such cases that the presentation of state-averaged indicators will prompt more refined discussions and lead to better understandings of all rural areas. Moreover, we hope that the indicators and gauges used here can serve as a model for states, districts, and policymakers to examine the publicly-available data themselves and at a grain-size that allows for a more finely tuned understanding and approach to equitably addressing the true needs of all students in their state.

Changes to the Gauges

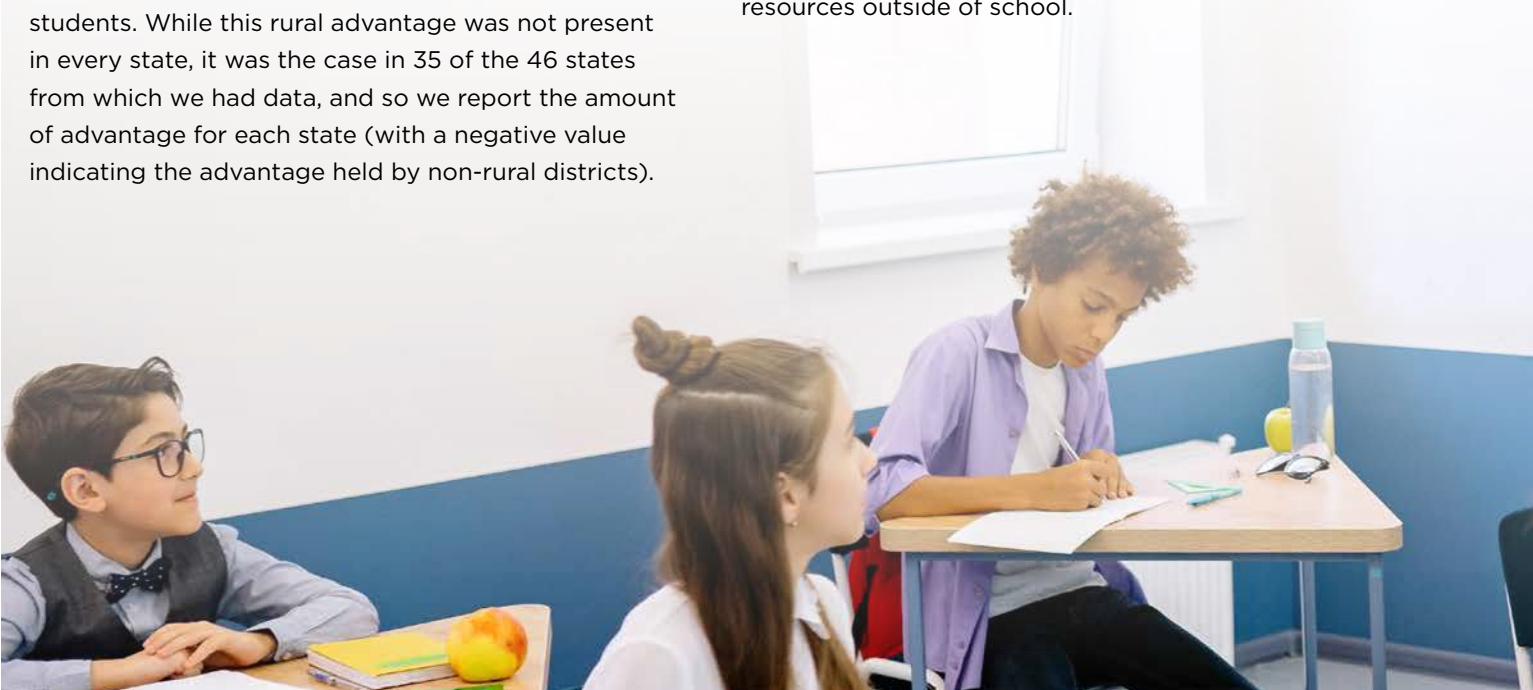
in This Edition

As in the last report, the current report includes 25 indicators organized into five gauges. To refine and better reflect our thinking about the contexts and characteristics of rural education, some indicators were changed and some were replaced with new indicators. The major differences from the previous report to this one are changes in how we measure educational outcomes and the addition of access to supports for learning and development.

The *Educational Outcomes* gauge looks much different from past reports. Recognizing the differential impacts of COVID-19 on math and reading, we separated the NAEP composite scores into separate indicators (the previous report had combined the two subjects), so that states can more precisely identify areas for growth. We also applied an equity lens based on wealth to evidence differences in educational outcomes between rural students who are experiencing poverty and those who are not. As in past reports, we highlight where rural strengths appear in the data on educational outcomes; one of these is the rural graduation rate. Across the United States, 89.8% of rural students graduated, compared to only 87.2% of non-rural students. While this rural advantage was not present in every state, it was the case in 35 of the 46 states from which we had data, and so we report the amount of advantage for each state (with a negative value indicating the advantage held by non-rural districts).

**Across the United States,
89.8% of rural students
graduated, compared to only
87.2% of non-rural students.**

The *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge debuts out of a sense of need expressed by a variety of shareholders in rural education. While the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of rural students has always been important, the recent COVID-19 pandemic underscores just how critical well-being is. Reliable access to healthcare (physical and mental) and to broadband internet are requisites for students to thrive. Do students and communities have the necessary resources when a single psychologist or counselor may serve caseloads of 310 children? (This is only the average—several states have ratios less than 1:400.) Is it reasonable to expect all children to meet the same academic standards in kindergarten when two of three children lack access to a public preschool? Inequities are exacerbated by unequal access to resources outside of school.



Notes on Methodology

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

First, the quartile categories used to describe a state’s position on the continuum from 1–50 are arbitrary and are used merely as a convenient way to group states into smaller units to facilitate discussion of patterns in the results. Thus, there is very little difference between the “Urgent” label assigned to Kansas based on its ranking of 13th on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge and the “Critical” label assigned to West Virginia based on its ranking of 14th on the same gauge.

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

Third, the ranking system should not be interpreted to suggest that rural education in low priority states does not deserve attention from policymakers. Every state faces challenges in providing a high-quality education for all children. Highest priority states are presented as such because they are states where a convergence of key factors impacting the schooling process result in extreme challenges to rural schooling, and therefore have the most comprehensive needs for policymakers’ attention. As mentioned previously, variation within state-level data signal the need for even states that do not appear on the high priority list to identify high-need situations—the urgent priorities hiding within the averages.

The ranking system should not be interpreted to suggest that rural education in low priority states does not deserve attention from policymakers. Every state faces challenges in providing a high-quality education for all children.



Top 10 Highest-Priority States in Rural Education



1. Mississippi

In the 10 *Why Rural Matters* reports to date, reaching back two decades, only once (in the 2009 report, when it ranked 3rd), was Mississippi not ranked as the highest-priority state for rural education across the United States. This is rather surprising given the constantly shifting scope of what has been measured, including indicators related to diversity, employment opportunities, academics, college preparation, transportation, gender, early childhood education, internet access, and mental health supports. From any perspective, the nearly 220,000 students attending school in Mississippi's rural districts deserve the highest priority attention of rural students anywhere in the United States. Over half of the public schools in Mississippi are in rural areas, and over half of the students in Mississippi attend schools in rural school districts. Equity is a serious issue, with the U.S. spending an average of \$2,000 less on instruction for a rural Mississippi student than is spent educating rural students on average across the United States. Teacher salaries are \$13,000 below the U.S. rural average and over \$17,000 below the average for all teachers across the United States, even after adjusting for local wage differences in other occupations. Over one in five rural Mississippi households lacks basic internet access, a further barrier to educational access. While all these conditions should be balanced by greater mental health support to Mississippi's rural children, there is only one psychologist or counselor for every 436 children, the fifth most concerning ratio in the states for which we have these data. For educators, funders, researchers, and policymakers looking to effect change where it is most needed in the rural United States, Mississippi is the clear starting place.



2. Arizona (tie)

Arizona's rural students are the most racially diverse on average when compared to other rural students in the United States.

The state ranks in the top 10 of all states for its racial and ethnic diversity. Rural school communities in Arizona are characterized by high poverty rates, high rates of medically uninsured children, and high student mobility. More than one in eight students change residences each year and only rural students in Alaska experience a higher disparity in graduation rates compared to their non-rural peers. Arizona has the seventh lowest per pupil spending on instruction in rural schools among all states—rural Arizona students receive about \$1,200 less per student on average than their peers in other states. Only four states spend proportionally more on transportation relative to instructional costs. Achievement in both math and reading is among the lowest in the United States.



2. Alabama (tie)

As the other second highest priority state, nearly half of the state's schools are rural, and only three states spend

less to educate rural students. Almost one in five of Alabama's children experience poverty and one in ten has changed residences in the past year. Nearly one in five lack access to broadband at home. Rural school districts in Alabama are particularly noteworthy for their large size: fewer than 2% are small. Accordingly, Alabama ranks among the top 10 of all states in transportation costs relative to instructional costs. Rural students in Alabama schools demonstrate low achievement relative to the median scores of rural test takers in other states on both reading and math.



4. West Virginia

Half of West Virginia's public schools and nearly one in four students are rural, with a student population characterized by high numbers of children experiencing poverty, high rates of participation in special education programs, and limited racial/ethnic diversity. West Virginia's history of large-scale consolidation has resulted in large schools, large districts, and burdensome transportation costs for rural districts. Average rural teacher salaries are nearly \$4,500 below the U.S. average, even after adjusting for comparable wages of other occupations in the rural areas. West Virginia's rural students score well below the U.S. average on both NAEP math and reading, and their rural high schools have lower graduation rates than the state's non-rural high schools. Access to learning resources is mixed, with two indicators (rural broadband access and rural female representation receiving gifted services) in the most urgent quartile and one other (access to public preschool) in the next quartile.



5. Missouri

Over 180,000 rural students attend public PK-12 schools in Missouri. This number is almost double the rural U.S. average. Exactly 44% of the state's schools are rural and they serve more than one in five of Missouri's students. Missouri spends less than \$6,000 per rural pupil, which is only 81% of the rural U.S. average. Rural Missouri students attend schools in communities with high poverty rates. Only seven states have higher rates of school community poverty. Even though school communities are likely to have high rates of poverty, schools are disproportionately funded by local sources of revenue. Rural teacher salaries are critically low. Missouri teachers make almost \$14,000 less (adjusted) than their rural peers in other states, and only Arkansas pays teachers less. Rural NAEP scores for fourth and eighth graders are low for reading (ranking 15) and middling for math (ranking 25).



6. Kentucky (tie)

A strength of rural education in Kentucky is its relative success at equitably identifying girls for gifted education.

This is not the case in some other states, where rural girls make up as few as 40% of the students on gifted education rosters. Another bright spot is Kentucky's success in graduating rural students from high school relative to non-rural students. However, given that Kentucky ranks "Crucial" and "Urgent" on two of five gauges, it's unsurprising that it ranks sixth in overall rural priority. The state has nearly double the U.S. average number of rural students, but these students receive just 35% of the state's education funding. Community poverty levels are dire and more than one in five students lives in homes where the household income is below the federal poverty line of \$30,000 for a family of four.



6. Louisiana (tie)

Louisiana's school population is characterized by high diversity and especially high poverty. Of all states with

available data, Louisiana has the lowest NAEP math scores among eighth-grade students who are eligible for free or reduced meals. Transportation costs are an outsized expense in rural districts in the state, with only three states having less favorable ratios than Louisiana. One of the state's most promising indicators is the high adjusted rural teacher salaries, but, rural children still lack equitable access to school counselors and school psychologists, with almost 500 students on average assigned to each mental health or school professional.



8. South Carolina (tie)

Four of every ten schools in South Carolina are located in a rural area, serving just under 17% of the state's public-school students.

More than one in five of the state's 120,000 rural students live below the federal poverty threshold, and households in the average rural school district neighborhood earn barely double the poverty threshold (third lowest in the 50 states). South Carolina's rural districts are some of the most racially diverse in the United States, and only six states have higher rural household mobility rates. Instructional spending and adjusted teacher salaries are well below U.S. averages, and rural South Carolina schools and districts are larger than nearly all other states. Academic outcomes are among the 10 most urgent across states on four of five indicators. Access to learning and development supports varies, with broadband access the indicator of greatest concern, with the seventh highest rate of rural households lacking broadband. Only four states have a higher representation of female students receiving gifted services.



10. North Carolina

Even with changes from our last report in the indicators measuring the health of its rural education system, North Carolina

continues to rank among the states most in need of attention. With over one in three students attending school in a rural district, North Carolina's total rural student enrollment is second only to Texas. Compared to their rural peers in other states, North Carolina's students are much more likely to live in a household with an income below the poverty line, attend a racially diverse school located in a community where many families live below the federal poverty line, and have moved residences within the last 12 months. Schools and districts are large, instructional spending on students is low, and the state is one of the few places where rural students graduate high school at a lower rate than their non-rural peers. Access to student supports is on par with peers in other states, except for low enrollment in public preschool access and inadequate internet connectivity.



8. Oklahoma (tie)

Oklahoma's rural districts are ranked as our eighth highest overall priority in the United States—down from fourth in *Why Rural Matters, 2018–2019*. More than half of all public schools serve rural communities, and its students are among the most diverse in the United States in terms of race, specialized education supports, poverty, and household mobility. Only five states rank below Oklahoma's \$5,614 instructional expenditure per rural pupil, and adjusted teacher salaries are nearly \$11,000 below the U.S. average. Academic performance is mixed, with rural NAEP grade 4 and 8 composites among the 10 most urgent states on math and reading. Access to learning and development supports is a critical concern, with among the highest state rates of rural families without broadband access (11th highest), uninsured rural children (12th highest), and ratio of students per psychologist/school counselor (17th).



Additional State Highlights

While nearly half (10 of 25) of the indicators in *Why Rural Matters 2023* are new or have changed substantially from previous reports, most of the same states still appear among the overall highest-priority states in the United States. In fact, Missouri is the only state in the top 10 highest-priority states that was not ranked in the Leading priority category in the previous report four years ago.

Except for Alaska and Maine, the 23 remaining states in the top two highest-priority categories (Leading and Major) form a contiguous block. This block stretches from the Southeast (where most of the highest-priority states are located), through the Southwest, and then through Oregon and into the northern Great Plains states. This same block is an almost identical match to the states with the highest rates of rural child poverty and the lowest instructional expenditures per pupil, underscoring the urgent need for greater equity of financial resources throughout the country.

While no state ranks among the highest-priority states on all five of our gauges, Mississippi and Arizona are among the highest-priority states on four of the five gauges. Six states—Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, New Mexico, Florida, and Nevada—are ranked as high priority on three gauges.

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

Delaware, Indiana, and Missouri saw their priority rankings rise substantially for this report, showing new urgency for attention to rural education issues. South Dakota saw the biggest drop in priority rankings, although it still ranks in the second-highest overall priority category, underscoring the ongoing need for increased support of its rural students.

Indiana's overall priority ranking rose from 29th to 11th. In addition to not raising instructional expenditures for rural students over the past four years at the same pace as the rest of the United States, Indiana is one of only four states where rural teacher salaries *dropped* during that same time frame. The greatest reason behind Indiana's ranking among the highest-priority states is its poor access to student supports for learning and development. Only Arizona and Idaho rank lower than Indiana on these measures of physical health, mental health, and educational access.



Results

The data for each state and state rankings for each indicator are presented in the charts and maps on pages 67-91 and the state-by-state results on pages 93-142. The results for each indicator are summarized and discussed below. To provide some context and to aid in making comparisons, U.S.-level results are presented in Table 1.



Importance Gauge

IMPORTANCE GAUGE INDICATORS

This gauge uses a combination of absolute and relative measures of the size and scope of rural education to characterize the importance of rural education to the well-being of the state's overall public education system. We define each of the indicators in the *Importance* gauge and summarize state and regional patterns observed in the data.^{vii}

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

The U.S. average for the percent of rural schools across the states is 29.3%, but states vary considerably from a low of 8.5% in New Jersey to a high of 74.3% in South Dakota. Half or more of all public schools are rural in 13 states (in descending order: South Dakota, Montana, Vermont, North Dakota, Maine, Alaska, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Wyoming, New Hampshire, West Virginia, Mississippi, and Iowa) and at least one-third of all schools are rural in 15 other states. In general, states with a high percentage of rural schools are those where sparse populations or challenging terrain make it difficult to transport students to consolidated regional schools in non-rural areas, and those where there has been less push to consolidate or successful resistance to consolidation. Predominantly urban states on the east and west coasts have the smallest percentages of rural schools.

TABLE 1 U.S. Rural Statistics

IMPORTANCE GAUGE	
Percent rural schools	29.3%
Percent small rural districts (fewer than 493 students)	50.0%
Percent rural students	15.7%
Number of rural students (median 94,593)	7,305,670
Percent state education funds to rural districts	16.2%
STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY GAUGE	
Rural diversity index	33.4%
Poverty level in rural school communities	291%
Percent rural students with IEP (Individualized Education Plan)	15.0%
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.6%
Percent rural household mobility	9.7%
EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE	
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,174
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.09
Median organizational scale (divided by 100)	2,651
Ratio of state revenue to local revenue	\$1.18
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$76,374
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE	
Rural poverty difference in math (grade 8)	22.0
Rural poverty difference in reading (grade 8)	18.2
Rural NAEP composite in math (grades 4 & 8)	255.9^{iv}
Rural NAEP composite in reading (grades 4 & 8)	238.3^v
Rural HS graduation rate advantage	2.6%^{vi}
ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT GAUGE	
Number of rural students per school psychologist or counselor	310
Percent rural households without broadband	13.4%
Percent rural school-aged children who are uninsured	6.7%
Percent rural children enrolled in public preschool	34.1%
Percent of rural gifted and talented students who are female	50.4%

Percent small rural school districts

is the percent of rural school districts that are below the median enrollment size (493 students) for all rural school districts in the United States. The higher the percent of districts with enrollments below 493, the higher the state ranks on the Importance gauge.

At least half of all rural districts are smaller than the U.S. rural median in 22 states. In six states (Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, Arizona, South Dakota, and California), at least 75% of the rural districts have fewer than 493 students. States with few or no small rural districts are located primarily in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic, regions that are characterized by consolidated, county-wide school districts. West Virginia, where more than half of all public schools are located in rural communities, does not have a single small rural school district because all 55 of the state's school districts are countywide systems. Three other states (Florida, Maryland, and Delaware) also have no small rural school districts. Vermont's drop from 90% small rural districts in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019* (a rank of third most crucial) to 69.8% in the current report (a rank of 12th) is particularly noteworthy and reflects the large-scale consolidation enacted under Act 46.^{viii}

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

More than 15% of all public-school students were enrolled in districts classified as rural in the 2021-22 school year.^{xxxviii} Only two states enrolled more than half of all students in rural districts: Vermont (54.4%) and Mississippi (50.3%). In six other states (Maine, South Dakota, West Virginia, North Dakota, North Carolina, and Montana), one-third or more of all students were enrolled in a rural district. Students in rural districts make up less than 10% of the total student population in 13 states.

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

More than half of all rural students in the United States attend school in just 11 states, including some of the most populous and urban states (in decreasing order of rural enrollment: Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Virginia, Michigan, and Alabama). Texas has more rural students than the combined total of the 18 states with the fewest rural students, and the combined states of Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia enroll nearly one in four of all rural students in the United States.

Percent state education funds going to rural schools represents the proportion of state public PK-12 funding that goes to school districts designated by NCES as rural. State funding as defined here includes all

state-derived revenues that are used for the day-to-day operations of schools (labeled current expenditures within the data and in school finance literature). Thus, capital construction, debt service, and other long-term outlays are excluded. The higher the percent of state funds going to rural education, the higher the state ranks on the Importance gauge.

Not surprisingly, states ranking high on percent rural schools and percent rural students also rank high on this indicator (i.e., the larger the proportion of rural schools and rural students, the larger the proportion of funding that goes to them). Some states provide a disproportionately larger amount of funding to rural districts to account for challenges such as teacher recruitment and retention, among other needs (e.g., New York, where 22% of state education funding goes to support rural school districts serving 11.6% of the state's public-school students). Conversely, the following 14 states provide disproportionately less funding to rural districts (beginning with the most disadvantageous to rural districts): Nebraska, Vermont, Rhode Island, Iowa, Delaware, South Dakota, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

IMPORTANCE GAUGE RANKINGS

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

With the exception of Alaska, all of the states classified as either *Crucial* or *Very Important* on this gauge are located in one of two contiguous blocks: Northern New England (Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine) or a large chain of 21 states beginning with Idaho and stretching southeast through the Dakotas, the Midwest, the Midsouth, and ending with North Carolina and Georgia on the Atlantic coast (see the *Importance* gauge map on page 8 for a visualization of these regional patterns). Notable absences from this block (due to the dominating statistical impact of large urban centers) include Illinois and Louisiana.

TABLE 2 Importance Gauge Rankings

How important is it to the overall public education system of the state to address the particular needs of schools serving rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state’s score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more central it is to the health of the state’s overall education system.

NOTABLE		IMPORTANT		VERY IMPORTANT		CRUCIAL	
CO	32.8	WI	25.4	WV	18.4	ME	9.2
CA	33.4	MN	25.6	KS	18.6	SD	9.6
CT	34.0	MI	26.0	MO	18.6	OK	11.4
AZ	34.4	PA	26.4	AL	19.2	VT	11.6
MA	37.0	VA	27.0	TN	19.4	MT	12.0
NJ	37.8	NY	27.8	GA	19.8	ND	12.2
FL	39.8	NM	29.0	AK	20.8	MS	14.4
DE	40.4	SC	29.6	ID	21.4	NC	15.0
MD	41.4	IL	31.6	IN	22.0	NH	15.6
UT	41.4	WA	32.0	OH	22.2	IA	16.0
NV	41.6	LA	31.8	WY	22.6	NE	18.0
RI	42.6	OR	32.2	TX	23.6	AR	18.2
HI	NA					KY	18.2

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

The six Northern New England and Prairie/Plains states located within the top six most crucial positions generally score high on all the indicators except number of rural students, on which none of them ranks higher than 14th (Oklahoma). Of the others, all five rank below the U.S. median and three rank in the least concerning quartile. These are states with smaller overall student enrollments, so the total number of rural students is smaller even though the percent of rural students is high.

More than half of all rural students (4.03 million, or 55%) are in states ranked in the most concerning quartile for the number of rural students indicator but only two of those states (North Carolina and Mississippi) are among the most concerning quartile in the overall Importance gauge; six others (Texas, Georgia, Ohio, Tennessee, Indiana, and Alabama) are in the second quartile.

Four of the 12 states with the largest rural student populations rank below the median on the overall *Importance* gauge. These four states—New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Michigan—have large urban populations that dwarf even a relatively sizable rural population. They rank low on the Importance gauge despite ranking high on the number of rural students indicator simply because they rank low on almost every other indicator in the gauge. For example, they average a ranking of 30th on the percent rural students indicator and none of them ranks higher than 27th on that indicator (Virginia and Michigan, tied).

See page 8 for a map showing regional patterns.



Student and Family Diversity Gauge

STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY

GAUGE INDICATORS

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

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

The rural diversity index made its first appearance in *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019*. Prior to that, we used the percentage of non-White rural students in each state as a rural diversity measure. The current indicator offers key advantages over the former method. First, rather than lumping all non-White races into a single category, this indicator accounts for differences between each of the seven NCES race codes,^x reflecting a much more

robust and accurate sense of what is meant by racial “diversity.” Second, this indicator better measures the extent of desegregation by defining diversity at the school level rather than the district level. Under the former method, a state with large populations of White and Black students who attended separate schools would be rated as highly diverse. To score high on this indicator, the rural students throughout the state must not only be of different races, but there must be significant racial diversity within individual schools.

How racially heterogeneous are rural districts in the United States? If you were to randomly choose two students from the same school in a rural district, your chances are better than one in three (33.4%) that the students would identify as different races. The range in rural diversity index among states is very large—from 12.8% in West Virginia to 61.3% in Delaware, where two randomly chosen students are more likely than not to be of different races. This “more likely than not” situation also occurs in Oklahoma (55.5%), North Carolina (52.7%), and Nevada (51.7%). An additional nine states have a rural diversity index above 40%: Maryland (49.1%), Florida (48.8%), Georgia (48.5%), Arizona (47.6%), South Carolina (47.0%), Texas (46.7%), New Jersey (43.8%), Virginia (42.0%), and Colorado (40.6%). At the district level, some of the values are much higher. Preston, Oklahoma has the distinction of being the rural district with the highest diversity index (76.1%). There are also many districts with lower values. In fact, 138 rural districts have a diversity index of 0.0%, meaning that every school in those districts is racially homogeneous; this is true of only three non-rural districts. Having a low diversity index does not necessarily mean that a school is primarily White. For instance, Benavides ISD in Texas has a low diversity index of 0.9%, yet of the district’s 233 students, all but one identifies as Hispanic.

States with a rural diversity index above 33% are in a nearly contiguous block starting from the Pacific Coast states and extending across the southern half of the United States to the Atlantic Coast, where the block

reaches as far north as New Jersey (see the indicator map on page 9 for a visualization of this block). The one exception outside this geographic block is Colorado (40.6%).

If you were to randomly choose two students from the same school in a rural district, your chances are better than one in three (33.4%) that the students would identify as different races.

Poverty level in rural school communities is a measure of the economic level of the school communities in rural districts. For each school, the National Center for Education Statistics collected data using the American Community Survey on the 25 nearest households with school-aged children. A weighted average of these households' incomes was then reported as a percentage of the poverty line.^{xi} The lower the percentage, the greater the level of poverty of the school communities and the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge.

Across the United States, the communities around schools in rural districts have an average household income 2.91 times (291%) that of the federal poverty line. Although only 1 in 234 rural school communities has an average income below the poverty line, 1 in 7 has an average income below 185% of the poverty line (the federal cutoff for reduced price meals). In South Dakota, the poverty level in rural school communities overall is 287%, ranking right at the U.S. median. This average hides the fact that three of the poorest rural school communities in the United States are in South Dakota—all Sioux schools with average household incomes less than 70% of the poverty line.

Other than New Mexico as an outlier at 185%, values on this indicator range from 217% (Kentucky) to 532% (Connecticut). There are 17 states with average rural school community incomes less than half that of Connecticut. States with relatively low-income rural school communities are concentrated in the Southwest and the Deep South, along with a handful in the Pacific Northwest and Appalachia.

Percent of rural students with IEP represents the percent of rural students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that qualifies them for special education services. The higher the percent of students receiving IEP supports, the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge.

Students with IEPs require additional supports and services only partly supported by federal funds, placing additional responsibilities on state and local funds to meet those needs. Across the United States, 15.0% of rural students qualify for special education services. In Pennsylvania (20.5%) and New Jersey (20.3%) more than one in five rural students has an IEP. Twelve additional states offer special education services for more than one in six rural students: Oklahoma (19.0%), Delaware (18.5%), Massachusetts (18.5%), Maine (18.3%), West Virginia (18.1%), New Hampshire (17.9%), Vermont (17.8%), Kentucky (17.8%), Indiana (17.5%), New York (17.4%), Minnesota (17.1%), and Connecticut (16.7%).

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

Poverty is consistently correlated with most educational outcomes. Recent shifts in how discounted meal eligibility is reported makes this a less reliable measure of poverty than it once was. For that reason, in *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019*, we introduced two new measures of poverty: poverty level in rural school

communities and percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty. Each has its limitations, but they work together to describe the degree of poverty within each state. The main limitation of percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty is that it does not differentiate between children who attend public school and those who do not. Some children in this age group may be attending private schools, home schools, or other alternative school settings, and others may not be attending school at all (either because they haven't started, have already finished, or have dropped out). It nevertheless serves as a useful measure of the extent of rural children experiencing poverty in each state.

There is no regional pattern for states with the lowest levels of rural children who are experiencing poverty. The four lowest-ranking states on this indicator are located in the Northeast, Mountain West, and Plains: Rhode Island (0.8%), Utah (5.4%), Nebraska (5.7%), and Vermont (6.4%). States with the highest levels of rural child poverty are mostly located in the Southwest (New Mexico [24.4%], Arizona [17.6%]) and the Mid-South/Southeast/Appalachian regions (Kentucky [22.6%], Louisiana [21.7%], Mississippi [21.7%], South Carolina [20.5%], Arkansas [18.0%], North Carolina [17.2%], Alabama [17.0%], and West Virginia [16.8%]). Other states with rural child poverty rates above 16% are Hawaii (22.2%) and South Dakota (16.3%). Nine of the states ranking in the highest quartile of rural children who experience poverty also rank among the 15 states with the lowest rural school community income levels (New Mexico, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Arkansas, Arizona, Alabama, and West Virginia). Four of the states with the highest levels of rural children who experience poverty also rank in the highest quartile on the racial diversity index (South Carolina, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia).

Percent rural student mobility represents the percent of households with school-age children who changed residences within the previous 12 months, per U.S. census figures. Housing insecurity disrupts consistency

in teaching and learning and impacts access to services and resources that support learning and development. The higher the mobility rate, the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge.

Across the United States, just under one in ten rural students (9.7%) has changed residence in the past 12 months, ranging from a high of 15.3% in Florida to a low of 5.8% in South Dakota. Apart from Florida, states ranking highest on this indicator are located in the Southwest and Mountain West (Arizona, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and Idaho). In all, 10 of the top 13 highest-mobility states are west of the Mississippi River (the exceptions are Florida, South Carolina, and Alabama). Among the continental states in the lowest quartile, only South Dakota (5.8%) and Nebraska (7.9%) are west of the Mississippi.

Of note, one of our past measures of rural diversity, the percentage of rural English Learners/Multilingual Learners, was not included in the indicator and gauge rankings due to data issues. Results are however reported in a follow-up section (see page 146).

STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY GAUGE RANKINGS

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

States in the most concerning quartile (labeled Urgent) on the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge are mostly clustered in the Southeast and Southwest (Delaware, Kentucky, and Nevada are exceptions). Among the indicators, percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty and the rural diversity index most closely parallel the overall gauge ranking, with, respectively, 9 of 13 and 8 of 13 most concerning states for the gauge also scoring in the most concerning quartile for the underlying indicator. By contrast, only three of the states in the highest priority quartile also placed in the most concerning quartile in terms of

the percent of rural students who qualify for special education services (i.e., students with IEPs). See page 9 for a map showing regional patterns.

To investigate the relationships among the different indicators, we ran bivariate correlation analyses among the five indicator rankings. Not surprisingly, the strongest correlation ($r = .70$) was between our two measures of poverty. The next strongest were a positive correlation ($r = .52$) between rural diversity index and percent rural student mobility and a negative correlation ($r = -.34$) between percent of rural students with IEP and percent rural student mobility. In other words, states with more rural students changing residences were also more likely to have more racial diversity and lower rates of students qualifying for special education services.

We also investigated the relationship between our diversity indicators and the indicators in the other gauges. The strongest relationships identified were between poverty measures and student outcomes in reading and math. Specifically, we found correlations of $r = .75$ for the relationship between poverty level in rural school communities and rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 math composite score, $r = .67$ for the relationship between poverty level in rural school communities and rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 reading composite score, $r = .79$ for the relationship between percent school-aged children experiencing poverty and rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 math composite score, and $r = .70$ for the relationship between percent school-aged children experiencing poverty and rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 reading composite score. These relationships highlight the disparities in educational outcomes associated with family and community economic status.

TABLE 3 Student and Family Diversity Gauge Rankings

How important is it to the overall public education system of the state to address the needs of diverse populations in schools serving rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address diversity issues in rural communities in their state.

FAIR		SERIOUS		CRITICAL		URGENT	
MA	30.2	AK	25.6	MS	20.4	AZ	8.2
ND	31.4	TN	25.8	OR	20.8	OK	9.4
IL	31.4	IN	26.6	CO	21.0	SC	10.0
MN	31.8	NJ	26.6	WV	23.0	DE	11.5
MD	33.0	SD	27.0	UT	23.2	FL	13.4
WI	33.6	ME	27.2	CA	23.2	NC	14.8
OH	34.0	CT	28.2	MO	23.2	KY	14.8
NH	35.8	WA	28.2	WY	24.2	LA	15.0
NE	38.0	NY	28.2	ID	24.2	NM	16.0
VT	38.2	MT	28.6	KS	24.2	AR	16.6
IA	38.6	MI	30.0	TX	25.0	NV	16.8
RI	43.3	PA	30.0	VA	25.0	AL	17.8
HI	NA					GA	18.6

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

We also identified significant relationships among diversity indicators and indicators from our newest gauge measuring access to supports for learning and development. Specifically,

- rural access to public preschool is associated with the rural diversity index ($r = .34$)—i.e., states with greater rural diversity provide less access to public preschool for rural children;
- poverty level in rural school communities is associated with number of students per school psychologist or counselor ($r = .53$), percent rural households without broadband ($r = .58$), and percent of school-aged rural children who are uninsured ($r = .35$)—i.e., states with higher poverty levels in rural communities provide less access to crucial non-academic supports for child well-being and development;
- percent rural students with IEP is associated with number of students per school psychologist or counselor ($r = -.35$)—i.e., states with higher rates of rural students with IEP provide greater access to school psychologists and counselors;
- percent school-aged children experiencing poverty is associated with number of students per school psychologist or counselor ($r = .47$) and percent rural households without broadband ($r = .66$)—i.e., states with higher levels of rural children experiencing poverty provide less access to crucial supports for child well-being and development; and
- percent rural household mobility is associated with percent of school-aged rural children who are uninsured ($r = .30$)—i.e., states with higher rates of rural students changing residences also have higher rates of rural children who are uninsured.

A key takeaway here is that rural student populations with the greatest needs (e.g., children experiencing economic distress, transient students) as well as more diverse student populations are less likely to have access to supports that promote higher levels of learning, development, and overall well-being. See page 9 for a map showing regional patterns.



GAUGE INDICATORS

For this gauge, we used indicators that describe characteristics of the public schooling system that are the result of policy decisions and thus are amenable to change through different policy decisions. Moreover, we focused attention on policy-driven characteristics that are highlighted in educational research as influencing student achievement and other measures of student well-being. Illustrating variations in state policy contexts thus can be interpreted to suggest, in relative terms, the extent to which current policies are helping or hindering rural schools and students. In this section, we define each of the indicators in the *Educational Policy Context* gauge and summarize state and regional patterns observed in the data. Hawaii is excluded from this gauge because its organization as a statewide district makes analysis impossible. On each indicator, the higher the ranking (the closer to one), the greater the concern that the policy context is not optimal for rural education.

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

This indicator allows us to make comparisons among states regarding the amount of money spent per pupil on teaching and learning in rural schools. The U.S. average of \$7,174 per rural pupil is much closer to the low end of the range (\$4,908 in Idaho) than to the high end (\$14,731 in New York and \$13,397 in Alaska).^{xii} In addition to Idaho, 26 other states spend less than half of the amount that New York spends per pupil for instruction in its rural school districts.

The highest spending states are mostly states with low-enrolled rural districts (Alaska, Wyoming, and New Hampshire), or Northeastern urban states with a relatively small absolute number of rural students (New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts). Pennsylvania (reporting the ninth highest rural instructional expenditures per pupil at \$9,616) fits with neither of these two groups.

Results from correlation analyses show associations between the rural instructional spending per pupil indicator and both rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 math composite score ($r = .46$) and rural NAEP grades 4 and 8 reading composite score ($r = .51$). It seems logical that states that spend less money on instruction demonstrate lower educational outcomes. When we consider these results in combination with the strong associations between spending on instruction and our two poverty measures ($r = .65$ for poverty level in rural communities and $r = .55$ for percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty), it suggests that state and federal sources of funding are inadequate to level the uneven playing field created by differences in community wealth and corresponding tax base.

When we consider these results in combination with the strong associations between spending on instruction and our two poverty measures...it suggests that state and federal sources of funding are inadequate to level the uneven playing field created by differences in community wealth and corresponding tax base.

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

Variations in pupil transportation costs are affected by factors beyond the control of policymakers (e.g., geography and terrain), but they also result from policies and practices related to the size and location of schools and school districts, personnel, and the length of students' bus rides. This indicator is an important factor in the educational policy context because extraordinary transportation costs shift money away from programs and resources that directly impact student learning.^{xiii}

On average, rural school districts across the United States spend about \$11.09 on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation, but there is considerable variation among states. Alaska and Vermont are outliers at \$29.98 spent on instruction (Alaska) and \$23.66 spent on instruction (Vermont) for every dollar spent on transportation in rural districts. Texas and Oklahoma both spend more than \$18 on instruction for every \$1 spent on transportation. The remaining states all spend less than half what Alaska spends, with the hardest hit states showing no regional patterns: West Virginia (\$6.40), Nevada (\$6.96), Indiana (\$7.89), Louisiana (\$8.09), Arizona (\$8.55), Oregon (\$8.59), New York (\$8.85), Alabama (\$8.90), and Kentucky (\$8.96). In fact, comparisons of states with similar geographies and terrains reveal substantial differences. South Dakota, for example, spends over \$3 more on instruction per transportation dollar than its neighbor North Dakota, and Vermont spends more than 2.5 times as much on instruction per transportation dollar (\$23.66) as its neighbor New York (\$8.85). It is worth noting that the state with the lowest ratio of instructional dollars per transportation dollar (West Virginia) contends with some terrain challenges but is also a state with a history

of large-scale consolidation resulting in regional schools serving large geographic areas and some of the longest bus rides for rural students in the United States.^{xiv} This highlights the importance of policy decisions on this (and other) indicators.

Median organization scale is a measure intended to capture the combined effects of school and district size. We computed the organizational scale for each rural school by multiplying the total school enrollment by the total district enrollment. For simplification in reporting, we then divided the result by 100. The figure reported for each state is the median for the organizational scale figure for every rural school in the state. The larger the organizational scale, the higher the state scores (the greater the level of concern) on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge.

School and district size exert influence over educational methods and schooling outcomes both individually and in combination with one another. Specifically, larger school and district size has been linked with undesirable schooling outcomes—particularly among students experiencing poverty and those with learning disabilities.^{xv} Further, larger districts exacerbate the negative influence of large school size and vice versa.^{xvi} This indicator provides a relative measure of the scale of operations for rural education in each state.

Large organizational scale is concentrated in the Southeast and contiguous areas in the Mid-Atlantic and Central Appalachia where countywide districts and regional high schools are the norm (Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, Delaware, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Kentucky, and West Virginia). Every state in the most concerning quartile on this indicator is located east of the Mississippi River. The lowest-ranking states are mostly in the Great Plains and the West, where the norm is small, independent districts serving distinct communities.

Ratio of state revenue to local revenue in rural districts is a measure of dependence on local fiscal capacity

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

This indicator needs to be interpreted with a great deal of caution because it does not take into account whether state or local revenue is enough to meet the needs of schools (in school finance terms, it is a measure of fiscal equity but not a measure of fiscal adequacy). A high ratio of state to local revenue may mean the funding system is equitable only in that it provides inadequate funding levels everywhere. A low ratio is a clearer signal that the school funding system relies too much on local fiscal capacity and, whether minimally adequate or not, is very likely inequitable. These data relate only to the proportion of revenue from state versus local sources in the rural districts of a state. Including the non-rural districts would likely alter the numbers considerably, in part because the industrial and commercial property tax base per pupil is usually lower in rural areas. In addition, much of the agricultural or forest land values in rural areas are withheld from the school tax base or their revenue yields are reduced by various forms of abatements and preferential assessments.

Across the United States, the average ratio of state to local revenue in rural school districts is \$1.18, meaning state government supplies \$1.18 in funding to rural districts for every \$1.00 allocated from local tax revenues. Nebraska has the lowest ratio with rural districts receiving only \$0.28 of state funding for every dollar of revenue generated locally. The next three lowest states are clustered in the Northeastern United States.: Rhode Island (\$0.36), Connecticut (\$0.42), and New Hampshire (\$0.45). The situation is dramatically different for their geographic neighbor, Vermont, where rural districts receive more than \$15 from the state

for \$1 raised locally—the highest ratio in the United States,^{xvii} and more than 3.5 times the funding ratio of the next highest state, Alaska (\$4.14). In the four years since *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019* was released, 27 states have decreased in ratio of state to local revenue; of these, New Mexico has seen the greatest decrease (from \$4.42 to \$3.34).

The highest-ranking states on this indicator (specifically, the states with the lowest level of state aid relative to local revenue) mostly fall into two distinct groups: Northeastern states with relatively low levels of rural poverty and high levels of rural property valuation (Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine); and Midwestern/Great Plains states with low to moderate levels of rural poverty and a largely agricultural property tax base in rural areas (Nebraska, South Dakota, Missouri, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Illinois). The first group includes many states that spend relatively high levels per pupil in their rural schools. All but Maine are among the highest-spending quartile for the rural instructional expenditure per pupil indicator (Maine is in the next quartile). The second group spends, on average, nearly \$4,000 less per pupil in their rural schools (\$7,278 compared to around \$11,229 for the first group). Texas is a geographic exception but is similar to the second group in its lower instructional spending per pupil (\$5,999).

Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE

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

In most states, rural school districts are simply at a competitive disadvantage in the market for teachers. There are many factors contributing to this challenge, but lower teacher salaries is certainly among them.

In most states, rural school districts are simply at a competitive disadvantage in the market for teachers. There are many factors contributing to this challenge, but lower teacher salaries is certainly among them. Beginning with *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019*, we adjusted teacher salaries based on the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT), created by the National Center for Education Statistics. This index helps adjust for geographic variations in teacher salaries by looking at Census data on salaries for other occupations in each district. For example, Sunol Glen Unified, a school district in rural California has an average teacher salary of \$106,241, but non-teacher occupations in that district earn 23.5% more than their peers in the same non-teacher occupations across the United States, yielding an adjusted teacher salary of \$86,025 after accounting for this premium. Meanwhile, teachers in Fayette County Schools in rural West Virginia earn an average of \$55,324, roughly \$50,000 less than the average Sunol Glen teacher. However, after adjusting for the 31.9% wage discount seen in other occupations, Fayette County teachers earn the equivalent of \$81,239—on par with the adjusted amount of the Sunol Glen teachers. There are limitations to this methodology (e.g., challenges with modeling for communities with the attraction of a low cost of living but other disamenities that make it difficult to attract teachers), but it does help compare the rural districts across the United States from a more equivalent perspective.

Adjusted salary expenditure per instructional FTE in rural districts ranges from \$50,848 in Arkansas to \$109,665 in New York, with a U.S. average in rural districts of \$76,374. Compare this to the adjusted average salary expenditure per instructional FTE in town districts (\$79,633), urban districts (\$80,396), and suburban districts (\$83,018). Although we have reported these disparities before, the fact that they persist even after adjusting for geographic variation in wages is especially noteworthy and speaks to the need for action by policymakers.

Five states show a decrease in adjusted rural teacher salaries since this indicator was first reported in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019*: Nevada (-11.3%), Arkansas (-8.5%), Vermont (-4.1%), Oregon (-0.7%), and Indiana (-0.7%). Of these, Arkansas is perhaps the most noteworthy—already among the states with lowest

adjusted salary expenditure per instructional FTE (ranking as the second highest priority in the previous report and the top priority state in this report) a decrease of \$4,751 is likely to make teacher recruitment and retention even more difficult.

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

TABLE 4 Educational Policy Context Gauge Rankings

How crucial is it for policymakers to address the policy context of their state as it relates to the specific needs of schools serving rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state’s score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

NOTABLE		IMPORTANT		VERY IMPORTANT		CRUCIAL	
DE	28.6	OK	24.6	SC	20.4	IN	14.0
NH	29.2	RI	24.8	GA	21.2	FL	14.2
NM	29.8	NC	25.8	TN	21.6	MS	14.6
NY	30.0	ND	25.8	KY	22.0	MO	15.6
MN	30.0	NJ	26.6	ME	22.4	AZ	16.2
KS	30.8	UT	26.8	ID	22.8	AL	17.2
NE	33.0	MA	27.0	MD	23.0	LA	17.4
WY	33.2	CT	27.4	OH	23.2	VA	17.4
VT	38.2	MI	28.0	OR	23.2	WV	18.4
CA	40.0	MT	28.2	SD	23.8	NV	19.6
WA	40.2	IA	28.4	CO	24.0	AR	19.6
AK	47.4			PA	24.0	TX	19.8
HI	N/A			WI	24.0	IL	20.0

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Indicators that correlate most strongly with adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE are rural instructional expenditures per pupil ($r = .68$), percent rural households without broadband access ($r = .48$) and rural NAEP grades four and eight reading composite score ($r = .41$). The first association is not surprising (i.e., the majority of instructional spending goes toward instructional salaries, so higher spending in one should be reflected in the other). The third association suggests that districts with higher levels of performance on reading tests are paying higher salaries to teachers and other instructional staff.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE RANKINGS

To gauge the extent to which the educational policy context is favorable or unfavorable for rural schools, we averaged each state's ranking on the individual indicators, giving equal weight to each (Table 4).

The indicators that contribute most to the crucial ranking of the states in the most concerning quartile for this gauge are rural instructional expenditures per pupil (8 of 13 are in the most concerning quartile on this indicator); ratio of instructional to transportation expenditure (7 of 13); and median organizational scale (6 of 13). The 13 Crucial states vary most in their ranking on the ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures indicator, ranging from top-ranked West Virginia to number 46 Texas, with an average ranking of 16. Only two states in the most concerning quartile for the gauge (Missouri and Texas) rank within the most crucial quartile on the indicator state revenue to schools per local dollars. These are states where school funding systems depend relatively more on local tax bases than state revenue.

Fairing best in this gauge are three Western states (Alaska, Washington, and California); three Northeastern states (Vermont, New York, and New Hampshire); three Great Plains states (Wyoming, Nebraska, and Kansas); and Minnesota, Alaska, and Delaware.

See page 10 for a map showing regional patterns.



Educational Outcomes Gauge

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE INDICATORS

This gauge includes indicators describing student academic performance on U.S. assessments. Four of our five educational outcome indicators in this report come from performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).^{xix} NAEP is administered and compiled by the U.S. Department of Education and offers assessment data for state-by-state comparisons, including comparisons of rural school districts as a sub-group within states. Although our use of NAEP scores continues a longstanding tradition of the *Why Rural Matters* reports, we nuance them in this report to better highlight socioeconomic inequities. The only non-NAEP indicator in this gauge compares the graduation rate in rural districts with the graduation rate in non-rural districts.

Rural poverty difference in math (grade 8) is the average score among students not eligible for free/reduced lunches minus the average score among students eligible for free/reduced lunches on the grade 8 NAEP math test. The larger this difference is, the greater the inequity between the two groups, and the more urgent the ranking.

In assessments of eighth-grade math, rural-specific data suggest that rural schools are relatively successful at mitigating the impacts of poverty. Rural children who experience poverty outperform all children who experience poverty^{xx} by an average of 20%; however, there is significant state-to-state variability. For example, the rural poverty difference in NAEP scores of eighth graders in Colorado, Louisiana, and South Carolina is greater than the average poverty difference in math scores for all students across the United States. Rural schools in Hawaii, Arizona, West Virginia, and Oklahoma have the smallest difference when scores of children who experience poverty and those who do not are compared.

Rural poverty difference in reading (grade 8) is the average score among students not eligible for free/reduced lunches minus the average score among students eligible for free/reduced lunches on the grade 8 NAEP reading test. The larger this difference is, the greater the inequity between the two groups, and the more urgent the ranking.

On average, rural schools have a smaller poverty difference in eighth-grade NAEP reading achievement than the combined measure for non-rural and rural schools. Specifically, the poverty difference in rural schools is an average of 17% smaller than the same poverty difference when both rural and non-rural schools are combined. Arkansas and Idaho lead other states on this indicator, both with poverty differences less than half the average for all schools. Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas score at or slightly above the U.S. average for all schools. Conversely, a few states have poverty differences on NAEP reading scores greater than the average for rural and non-rural schools across the United States. In descending order those states are Virginia, Mississippi, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada, Connecticut, Arizona, and Minnesota.

Rural NAEP composite in math (grades 4 and 8) is the average of the standardized grade 4 math NAEP scores and the standardized grade 8 math NAEP scores. This can be interpreted as the number of standard deviations the rural districts of the state were above (or below) the U.S. rural mean for the same tests. As with rural NAEP composite reading scores, on average, the composite scores for fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP reading show very little disparity between rural students and all students in the United States. However, in a few states such as New Mexico, Hawaii, West Virginia, Alabama, and Louisiana, rural students have significantly lower NAEP scores than the average combined scores of rural and non-rural students in the United States. Likewise, other states scored significantly higher. Connecticut is of particular interest given its significant poverty difference in grade 8 reading, contrasted to its relatively high rural scores

on the rural NAEP composite in math for grades 4 and 8. Other states with comparatively high rural NAEP composite scores include Nebraska, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.

Rural NAEP composite in reading (grades 4 and 8) is the average of the standardized grade 4 reading NAEP scores and the standardized grade 8 reading NAEP scores. This can be interpreted as the number of standard deviations the rural districts of the state were above (or below) the U.S. rural mean for the same tests.

Composite scores for fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP reading are almost identical between rural and non-rural students in the United States. Across states, however, variations exist in rural means. New Mexico, West Virginia, Hawaii, Oklahoma, Alabama, South Carolina, Washington, Virginia, Maine, Texas, and Oregon fall in the quartile of highest concern for fourth- and eighth-grade rural NAEP reading. More than half of the states performing best on this indicator are located in the Northeastern U.S. (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, and New Hampshire). Other states also in the highest-scoring quartile in fourth- and eighth-grade rural NAEP reading are Utah, Colorado, Ohio, Wyoming, and Pennsylvania.

Rural high school graduation rate advantage is calculated as the rural high school graduation rate minus the non-rural high school graduation rate. Positive quantities indicate higher state graduation rates for rural students than for non-rural students.

Throughout the United States, rural students graduate at higher rates than non-rural students (89.8% versus 87.2%). There are some exceptions at the state level, however, and states with rural graduation rates that are lower than non-rural graduation rates are: Arkansas, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, South Carolina, South Dakota, Oregon, West Virginia, California, North Carolina, and Delaware. These states have a negative value on this indicator and are ranked as the most urgent. States that are graduating rural students at rates that are

substantially higher than non-rural students include Rhode Island, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, and Nebraska.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE RANKINGS

To calculate the educational outcomes for students attending rural districts in each state, we averaged each state’s ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each indicator (Table 5).

States with the least concern for *Educational Outcomes* were concentrated in the Northeast (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire), with two states in the Midwest (Nebraska and Ohio) and one in the West (Idaho) also receiving Fair rankings. States that received rankings in the quartile of most concern

were concentrated in the South (South Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, Alabama, and Mississippi), with the rest scattered across the United States (New Mexico, Oregon, Delaware, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada, South Dakota, and Kansas).

As in previous versions of *Why Rural Matters*, children experiencing poverty continue to experience greater challenges on achievement testing. However, six of the ten states that received a *Fair* ranking (the best ranking) on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge also ranked *Fair* in the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, Nebraska, New Jersey, and Connecticut). Conversely, four states that ranked of most concern in the *Educational Outcomes* gauge also ranked of most concern in the *Access to Supports for Learning and*

TABLE 5 Educational Outcomes Gauge Rankings

Given the educational outcomes of rural students across the 50 states, how urgent is it that policymakers take steps to address the spatial and educational inequities that impact educational outcomes? These rankings represent the average of each state’s score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

FAIR		SERIOUS		CRITICAL		URGENT	
ID	29.8	AR	24.2	WV	7.4	NM	7.4
NH	30.2	OK	24.2	ME	18.2	SC	9.6
PA	31.2	WY	24.8	KY	18.6	OR	9.7
CT	31.8	IN	25.0	WA	20.2	LA	10.2
OH	32.0	FL	25.8	GA	20.4	VA	12.6
NJ	36.7	CO	26.0	MN	21.2	DE	13.0
NE	38.2	TN	26.0	NC	21.4	AL	13.2
MD	38.7	ND	26.6	MT	22.8	AZ	14.0
RI	41.7	WI	27.2	MI	23.4	HI	14.5
MA	44.7	NY	29.0	TX	23.5	NV	15.0
AK	NA	IA	29.6	IL	23.8	MS	15.0
CA	NA	UT	29.7	MO	23.8	SD	16.2
VT	NA					KS	17.2

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Development gauge (New Mexico, Oregon, Arizona, and Mississippi). As achievement is inextricably linked to access to opportunities and support for learning, this makes a compelling comparison highlighting the need to focus resources and opportunities on children's learning and development.



Access to Supports for Learning and Development Gauge

ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT GAUGE INDICATORS

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

Number of rural students per school psychologist or school counselor is a measure of rural students' access to trained professionals who provide support for social-emotional concerns. A higher number of rural students served by a single psychologist or counselor means less access for those students to that resource. Thus, the larger the number, the higher the state ranks on the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge and the more serious the concern for the policy environment.

On average, the ratio of rural students to school psychologists/counselors in the United States is 310:1 (i.e., one psychologist or counselor for every 310 students in rural districts). States range from a high of 574:1 (Michigan) to a low of 149:1 (New Hampshire). In addition to Michigan, six other states have ratios of 400:1 or higher: Indiana (501:1), Louisiana (489:1), Alaska (443:1), Mississippi (436:1), California (427:1), and Minnesota (400:1). At the other end of the spectrum, seven states join New Hampshire with ratios of 225:1 or less: Connecticut (167:1), Vermont (169:1), New York (186:1), New Jersey (193:1), Massachusetts (210:1), Wyoming (220:1), and Rhode Island (221:1).

States providing less access to school psychologists and counselors show no real regional patterns whereas states providing the greatest access show a clear regional pattern (with the exception of Wyoming, all higher access states are in the Northeast).

Percent rural households without broadband is calculated as the total number of rural households lacking access to broadband, divided by the total number of rural households. A higher rate of rural households without broadband indicates a lack of access to communication and enrichment opportunities for students and families (and, in the case of mandatory remote schooling such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of access to basic schooling operations).^{xxi} The higher the state's percentage, the higher the state scores on the indicator.

States with the highest rates of rural households lacking broadband are almost exclusively located in the Southeast and contiguous Central Appalachia regions. Following New Mexico (the highest-ranking state at 21.4% of rural households without broadband), they are: Mississippi (20.6%), Alabama (18.9%), West Virginia (17.5%), Arkansas (17.4%), Louisiana (17.2%), South Carolina (16.5%), Kentucky (16.1%), Missouri (15.8%), Tennessee (15.7%), Oklahoma (15.4%), Virginia (15.0%), North Carolina (14.8%), and Georgia (14.7%). Ten states located mostly in the Northeast, Mountain West, and West all have less than 10% of rural households without broadband access: Connecticut (5.2%), Rhode Island (5.7%), New Jersey (5.8%), Massachusetts (6.5%), Utah (6.9%), Colorado (7.5%), New Hampshire (7.9%), Wyoming (8.8%), and Washington (9.1%). Delaware (8.9%) is an exception to the regional patterns. Across the United States, 13.4% (nearly one in six) of rural households lack broadband access.

Percent of rural school-aged children who are uninsured represents the total number of rural school-aged children who are uninsured, divided by the total number of rural school-aged children. Lack of insurance is associated with lack of medical care and can have a

dramatic impact on students' learning and development (e.g., lacking preventative care that can minimize time out of school for illnesses). The higher the state's percentage, the higher the state score on the indicator.

Across the United States, 6.7% of rural school-age children are uninsured. All but three of the states with the highest rates of uninsured rural children are located west of the Mississippi: Wyoming (13.9%), Texas (13.5%), Arizona (11.8%), North Dakota (10.1%) Idaho (9.9%), Alaska (9.3%), Montana (9.1%), Nevada (8.9%), and Oklahoma (8.8%). The exceptions are Pennsylvania (9.7%), Indiana (9.4%), and Ohio (9.0%). States with the lowest rates of uninsured rural school-aged children (i.e., states where more rural school-aged children have health insurance) are located in the Northeast, Mid-

Atlantic, and West: Massachusetts (1.1%), Vermont (1.4%), Rhode Island (1.6%), New Jersey (2.6%), Connecticut (3.5%), Hawaii (3.5%), Virginia (3.6%), Maryland (3.7%), Washington (3.7%), and West Virginia (3.8%).

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

The U.S. average for this indicator is 34.1% of rural children enrolled in public preschool, but the results for

TABLE 6 Access to Support for Learning and Development Gauge Rankings

Given the levels of access to learning and development supports among rural students in each state, how urgent is it that policymakers take steps to address the specific needs of schools serving rural communities? These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

FAIR		SERIOUS		CRITICAL		URGENT	
WI	29.8	SC	24.8	AL	20.2	AZ	10.4
DE	30.0	AR	24.8	WV	20.2	ID	13.0
MD	30.2	GA	25.4	NC	20.6	IN	13.2
IA	31.4	SD	25.6	MT	20.8	AK	13.4
NE	32.4	NH	25.8	NV	21.8	MS	15.4
HI	32.7	VA	26.4	ND	22.4	PA	16.2
UT	33.0	WY	27.2	OK	22.6	NM	16.6
NY	35.0	KS	27.6	CA	22.6	FL	17.4
CT	37.4	MI	28.0	LA	23.4	TN	17.4
RI	38.2	ME	28.2	IL	23.6	TX	17.6
MA	40.2	MN	28.8	WA	24.0	OR	17.6
VT	43.4	CO	28.8	KY	24.4	OH	19.0
NJ	43.6					MO	19.8

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

individual states vary dramatically—from nearly six in ten students in Nebraska (57.8%) to slightly more than one in ten (11.8%) in Oregon. In addition to Oregon, other states ranking high on this indicator are mixed regionally, including: Delaware (14.7%), Nevada (20.3%), California (20.9%), Rhode Island (21.7%), Connecticut (22.1%), New Hampshire (24.1%), Florida (25.0%), Maryland (25.1%), Idaho (25.6%), Washington (25.7%), Virginia (26.2%), and Arizona (26.3%). States ranking lower in priority on this indicator (i.e., states with higher rates of public preschool enrollment for rural children) are similarly varied in terms of geographic region, with the Plains, Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast all represented: Nebraska (57.8%), Vermont (56.1%), Iowa (55.2%), Wyoming (53.9%), Minnesota (47.9%), Oklahoma (47.7%), Illinois (47.6%), Kansas (47.4%), Georgia (44.8%), Missouri (44.6%), Massachusetts (42.0%), and New Jersey (41.8%).

Percent of rural gifted and talented students who are female is an access measure directly tied to equity. Access to gifted and talented services is an important support for students, promoting engagement and providing challenging enrichment opportunities. The lower the state's percentage of gifted and talented students who are female, the higher the state scores on the indicator.

Across the United States, 50.4% of the rural gifted and talented student population is female^{xxiii} (given roughly equal proportions of male and female students in rural school districts, this would seem to be equitably representative). Admittedly, this measure does not tell the full story of gender equity in access to gifted programming because we are not able disaggregate the data by subject (e.g., we cannot measure the extent to which girls are represented in gifted math programs, or the extent to which boys are represented in gifted reading programs), but it provides a starting point for consideration of the issue. Individual states depart considerably from the U.S. average, from 40.0% in Alaska to 62.4% in Rhode Island. In all, eight states show rates of 48% or lower: Alaska (40.0%),

New Hampshire (45.4%), Wyoming (45.7%), Arizona (46.9%), Tennessee (47.1%), Washington (47.1%), Idaho (47.2%), and West Virginia (48.0%). A total of 10 states show rates higher than 53%: Rhode Island (62.4%), Louisiana (59.7%), Michigan (58.6%), Vermont (57.0%), South Carolina (56.4%), Utah (56.4%), New York (55.2%), Arkansas (55.1%), New Jersey (55.1%), and Connecticut (53.5%). Nine of ten states with 53% or higher female representation in gifted and talented programs are located east of the Mississippi. Five of eight states with 48% or lower representation are west of the Mississippi.

ACCESS TO SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT GAUGE RANKINGS

To gauge access to learning and development supports for students attending rural districts in each state, we averaged each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each (Table 6).

Based on the five indicators used in this gauge, the majority of states where rural students have the least access to supports for learning and development are not clustered geographically. Two small clusters (Pennsylvania-Ohio-Indiana and Texas-New Mexico-Arizona) are joined here by states in the Southeast and Midwest. There are no Northeastern states in the Urgent and Critical categories; Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states are mostly ranked near the bottom in the *Fair* (least concerning) category.

The indicators that contribute most to the urgent ranking of the states in the most concerning quartile for this gauge are number of rural students per school psychologist or counselor and percent of rural school-aged children who are uninsured (both with 7 of 13 states in the most concerning quartile on this indicator). The 13 *Urgent* states vary most in their rankings on the percent rural children enrolled in public preschool indicator, ranging from number 1 Oregon to number 41 Missouri, with an average ranking of 22.

See page 13 for a map showing regional patterns.



Rural Education Priority Gauge

To create priority rankings that reflect the overall status of rural education in each state, we averaged the cumulative rankings on the five gauges (*Importance, Student and Family Diversity, Educational Policy Context, Educational Outcomes, and Access to Supports for Learning and Development*). The rankings for the *Rural Education Priority* gauge are presented in Table 7.

Despite a complete overhaul of the indicators in the *Educational Outcomes* gauge and the addition of the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge with five new indicators (replacing the *College Readiness* gauge in previous reports), the list of states ranking as the highest priority (i.e., in the *Leading* quartile) shows little change since the 2018–2019 report. Only three states (Missouri, Indiana, and Oregon) are new additions to the *Leading* quartile, replacing Florida, Texas, and South Dakota (each of which now appears in the next highest priority category, the *Major* quartile).

States showing the biggest jumps in priority ranking since *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019* are Indiana (from 29th to 11th, moving from the third quartile [*Significant*] to the *Leading* quartile) and Missouri (from 18th to 5th, moving from the second quartile [*Major*] to the *Leading* quartile). In the other direction, South Dakota (from 5th to 18th), Washington (from 26th to 36th), and Vermont (from 32nd to 42nd) showed the biggest improvements in priority. As a reminder, this series of reports is not designed to be a longitudinal scoreboard where an increase in priority means that something bad must have happened in the rural areas of that state over the past several years (and vice versa). It simply means that the rural areas of that state have more pressing concerns relevant to the indicators measured in this current report.

Despite a complete overhaul of the indicators in the *Educational Outcomes* gauge and the addition of the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge...the list of states ranking as the highest priority...shows little change since the 2018–2019 report.

Nine of the 13 states in the *Leading* quartile of overall rural education priority are located in a contiguous region located mostly in the Southeast (Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, Missouri, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Arkansas; this block is adjacent to four other states in the second-highest (*Major*) priority quartile: Florida, Georgia, Virginia, and Tennessee. Such a clearly demarcated geographical block of high-priority states suggests regional challenges that transcend state lines. These challenges may be very different than those facing Arizona (*Leading*) and New Mexico (*Major*).

None of the highest-ranking states on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge rank in the most concerning quartile on all five underlying gauges. Two of the highest-ranking states (Mississippi and Arizona) rank in the most concerning quartile on four of the five underlying gauges. Three more (Alabama, Louisiana, and Arkansas) rank in the most concerning quartile on three gauges. Seven (Missouri, Kentucky, Oklahoma, South Carolina, North Carolina, Indiana, and Oregon) rank in the most concerning quartile on two gauges, and the remaining high-priority state (West Virginia) ranks in the most concerning quartile on only one gauge. Rankings on the *Student and Family Diversity* and *Educational Policy Context* gauges most closely parallel the rankings on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge, with eight of the states in the *Leading* quartile on the

Rural Education Priority gauge also placing in the most concerning quartile on both the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge and the *Educational Policy Context* gauge. Six of the *Leading* quartile states on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge placed in the most concerning quartile on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge; five placed in the most concerning quartile on the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge and the *Rural Importance* gauge.

In the *Notable* (lowest priority) quartile on the *Rural Education Policy Priority* gauge, no state ranked in the least concerning quartile on all five of the underlying gauges, and only two states (Rhode Island and Massachusetts) ranked in the least concerning quartile on four of the five underlying gauges. A total of 35 states ranked in the highest-priority quartile on at

least one of the five gauges. Clearly, every state has rural education issues that need to be addressed. The *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge most closely parallels *Notable* rankings on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge. Twelve of 13 states ranking in the *Notable* quartile on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge also ranked in the least concerning quartile on the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge (of note, a new gauge for this report that reflects our effort to measure and describe the distribution on relevant non-academic resources and infrastructure). The takeaway from this finding is unmistakable: States that have the greatest need for attention from policymakers to address rural student and family needs—based upon the five gauges as a whole, that represent both demographic givens and contexts created and maintained through policy

TABLE 7 Rural Education Priority Gauge Rankings

Rankings represent the combined average ranking for each state on the five gauges (*Importance, Student and Family Diversity, Educational Policy Context, Educational Outcomes, and Access to Supports for Learning and Development*). The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the greater the need for policymakers to address rural education issues within that state.

NOTABLE		SIGNIFICANT		MAJOR		LEADING	
MN	32.8	KS	25.0	FL	17.8	MS	7.8
WI	33.0	ND	25.2	NM	17.8	AZ	11.6
IA	34.4	DE	26.4	GA	18.6	AL	11.2
UT	35.4	IL	26.6	TX	18.8	WV	13.6
VT	36.5	PA	27.0	SD	19.2	MO	15.0
NY	36.8	OH	28.4	NV	19.4	LA	15.2
NE	37.4	CO	29.0	VA	19.4	KY	15.2
MD	38.6	WY	30.0	TN	20.0	OK	15.6
CT	38.6	CA	31.0	ME	20.0	SC	15.6
NJ	39.0	MI	31.0	ID	20.2	NC	15.8
MA	41.6	WA	31.2	MT	22.8	IN	16.6
RI	43.8	NH	32.4	AK	24.8	AR	16.8
HI	NA					OR	17.2

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

decisions—serve a student population with less access to non-academic supports that contribute to academic success and overall well-being lower priority states. Clearly, these states (and others) must look more broadly at education issues and marshal policy and practice to address equity issues beyond traditional schooling factors.

As in past reports, there were a few cases where states ranked very high or very low on one gauge but consistently the opposite on other gauges. Two examples: Florida ranked 44th on *Importance* but 5th on *Student and Family Diversity*, 2nd on *Educational Policy Context*, and 8th on *Access to Supports for Learning and Development*. Ohio, on the other hand, ranked 12th on the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge, but 44th on *Student and Family Diversity* and 46th on *Educational Outcomes*. So, in Florida, rural students represent only a small proportion of the total public-school enrollment in what is the third most populous state, have high needs, attend schools hampered by an unfavorable policy context, and offer limited access to learning and development supports. In Ohio, rural students lack access to learning and development supports, have relatively less need, and have relatively better learning outcomes.

Conclusions and Implications

Over 7 million students are enrolled in rural school districts, 15.7% of all public-school students in the United States. Roughly one in seven of those rural students live below the poverty line, more than one in six qualify for special education services, and one in ten has changed residence in the previous 12 months.

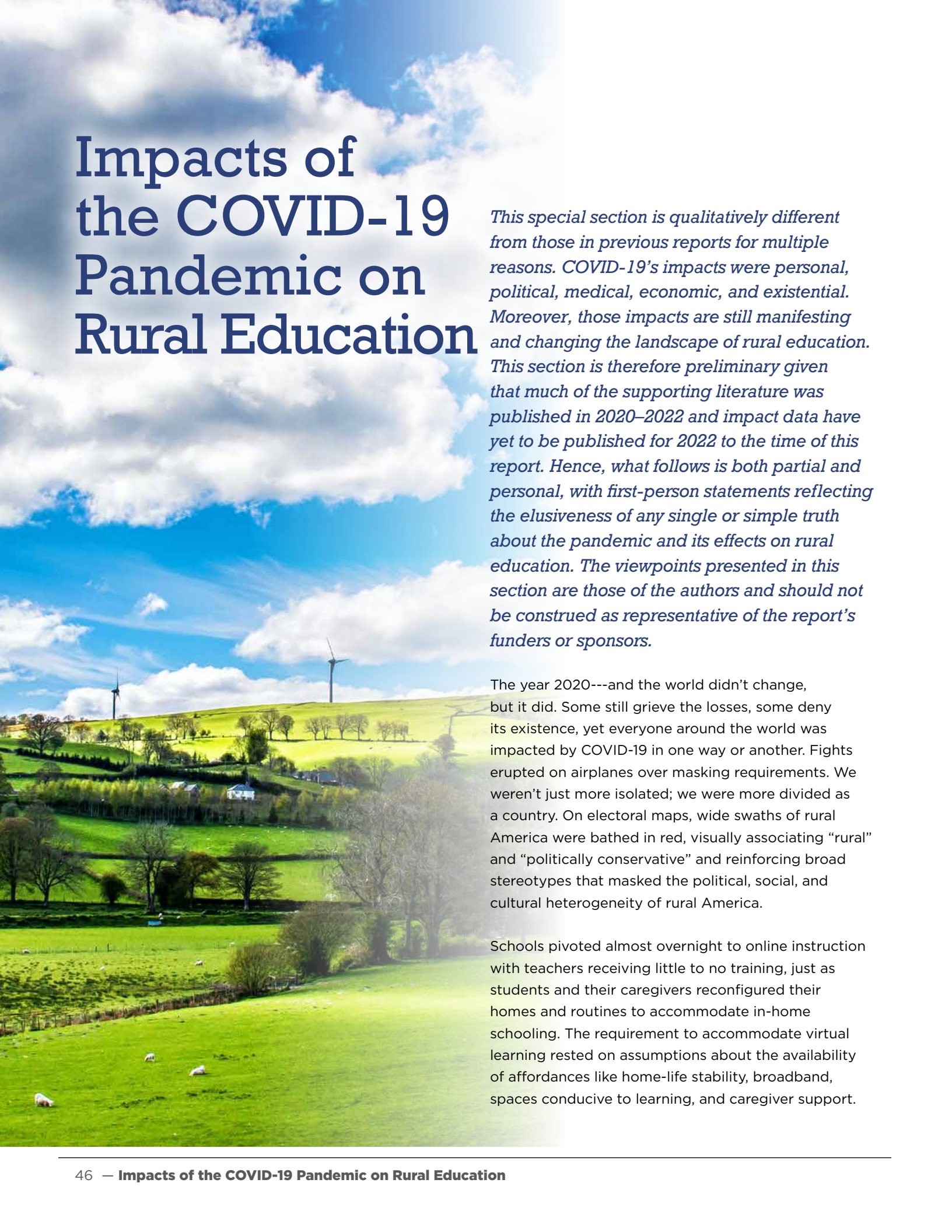
The results published in this report, particularly when viewed in the context of the series of reports, should communicate clearly to policymakers that they cannot ignore the challenges faced by rural schools and

the students they serve, nor disregard what those challenges mean to state and U.S. goals of improving achievement and increasing access to opportunities and supports for all students, especially those impacted by educational and spatial inequities.

The invisibility of rural education persists in many states where education policy is dominated by highly visible urban problems. In 18 states, at least one-fourth of all public-school students are enrolled in rural school districts. On the other hand, more than half of all rural students live in just 10 states. Two states (North Carolina and Georgia) are in both categories (i.e., in a state with large proportional and absolute rural student enrollments). The majority of rural students attend school in a state where they constitute less than 20% of the public-school enrollment, and more than one in four are in states where they constitute 15% or less.

The Bottom Line

Rural schools and communities continue to face substantial challenges due to a host of issues related to educational and spatial inequities. As results from the new *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge indicate, these challenges are compounded by the inaccessibility of non-academic resources and infrastructure that are integral to academic success and student well-being. As post-pandemic recovery continues across the United States, states and local districts must reevaluate what it means to provide a public education that meets student and family needs and prepares students for life beyond PK-12 schooling (including college and career readiness and engaged citizenship). These challenges are widespread, but most intense in the Southeast, Southwest, and parts of Appalachia. Moreover, the same challenges recur throughout the report series and irrespective of changes in the specific indicators used. We know what the challenges are, and we know where they are felt most intensely; what is needed is the will to address them.



Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rural Education

This special section is qualitatively different from those in previous reports for multiple reasons. COVID-19's impacts were personal, political, medical, economic, and existential. Moreover, those impacts are still manifesting and changing the landscape of rural education. This section is therefore preliminary given that much of the supporting literature was published in 2020–2022 and impact data have yet to be published for 2022 to the time of this report. Hence, what follows is both partial and personal, with first-person statements reflecting the elusiveness of any single or simple truth about the pandemic and its effects on rural education. The viewpoints presented in this section are those of the authors and should not be construed as representative of the report's funders or sponsors.

The year 2020---and the world didn't change, but it did. Some still grieve the losses, some deny its existence, yet everyone around the world was impacted by COVID-19 in one way or another. Fights erupted on airplanes over masking requirements. We weren't just more isolated; we were more divided as a country. On electoral maps, wide swaths of rural America were bathed in red, visually associating "rural" and "politically conservative" and reinforcing broad stereotypes that masked the political, social, and cultural heterogeneity of rural America.

Schools pivoted almost overnight to online instruction with teachers receiving little to no training, just as students and their caregivers reconfigured their homes and routines to accommodate in-home schooling. The requirement to accommodate virtual learning rested on assumptions about the availability of affordances like home-life stability, broadband, spaces conducive to learning, and caregiver support.

Lack of such affordances demanded innovation and resilience among families. Working parents called upon grandparents and other family members to monitor students during the workday, formed “pods” (groups of kids from different families rotating to different homes to complete the school day), and traveled to places where they could access wifi, including the school parking lot, but also fast food restaurants.

Mostly, we just wanted it to end so that we could return to our jobs and schools, and to the spaces where we connected with family and friends prior to the pandemic. We wanted things to be as if the pandemic hadn’t happened. Despite the heterogeneity of rural places in the United States, a common feature is the connectedness: people-to-people, people-to-land, even people-to-past as tradition. As such, the recommended/mandated social distancing to control the spread of the virus was a direct assault on the defining characteristic of rural communities.

The greatest challenge in analyzing on any scale the effects of the pandemic on rural education is the lack of data and research on the subject. In the world of large-scale data sets, and especially publicly-available ones, a 2–3 year lag in availability means that as of the writing of this report, COVID-era data are only just now becoming available. As such, this essay draws on the limited research available, in some cases extrapolating from research on other similar situations (such as the 2005 Pakistan earthquake), to set the stage for the next round of *Why Rural Matters*, where we will have a more complete picture of pandemic impacts on education. This is unfortunate not only for the tentativeness of this special section, but more importantly because there is little doubt that there will be gaps in learning and experiences of our students that require urgent interventions.

This section uses scant literature and data from 2020–2023 to shine a light on rural education in the United States during that time period. Rural places

have long demonstrated both resilience and a spirit of innovation that lend itself to an optimism about post-pandemic rural education. Anecdotal reports demonstrate the ingenuity and dedication of school districts, including the delivery of meals to students, greater coordination with parents in supporting their students’ remote learning, and the delivery of technology and, where possible, access to broadband internet. We acknowledge these efforts and see them as perhaps even evidence of how rural and small-town communities can coordinate and implement resiliency strategies in ways that other locale types may not be able to do. This section focuses instead on pandemic effects that may require the attention of policymakers, districts, and community members—that is, places where more or different actions are needed.

Two broad and overlapping themes emerge from the limited literature available on the impacts of COVID on rural education: education and well-being. The former includes subthemes of teaching and curriculum, inequities and gaps, educational outcomes, and tech resources. “Well-being” represents the context of impacts on education, namely homelife changes, economic impacts, and the availability of wraparound services. Given the already limited state of literature broadly, rural-specific COVID-19 literature is even more limited. As such, the impacts described below often are for rural and non-rural locales alike. Rural-specific impacts are highlighted wherever possible.

**“It’s never the changes we want
that change everything.”**

Junot Díaz from *The Brief Wondrous Life
of Oscar Wao*

The 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports^{xxiv} were the most comprehensive, starkest measure of what is surely to be more significant pandemic-related impacts on learning to follow. They illustrate the impacts on educational outcomes in reading and mathematics in the fourth and eighth grades, showing learning gaps (race, gender, year-over-year, locale) widening or shrinking according to complex dynamics/causes that cannot yet be determined.

The overarching result in NAEP data was a reduction in scores. In mathematics, rural grade 4 performance declined by two points and rural grade 8 performance declined by eight points in 2022 compared to 2019. In reading, rural grade 4 performance declined by one point and rural grade 8 performance declined by four points.

In grade 4, gender gaps among rural students widened slightly for mathematics (from a gap of three points to a gap of four points) and narrowed for reading (from a gap of seven to a gap of five—of note, this “narrowing” of the gap does not represent an improvement among boys; they just declined less than girls). In grade 8, gender gaps among rural students widened for mathematics (indeed, reversing from girls on average scoring two points higher than boys to girls on average scoring four points lower than boys) and gender gaps for reading stayed constant (with girls outperforming boys by nine points). Mathematics scores for rural grade 8 girls appear to be the hardest hit by the COVID-19 period, declining 11 points from 2019 to 2022 (more than any other student group on either test at either grade level).

Changes over the same time frame in gaps tied to race among rural students were mixed, with the gap narrowing or remaining flat on three measures (grade 4 reading, declining from a gap of 16 to a gap of 13; grade 8 reading, declining from a gap of 13 to a gap of 12; and grade 4 mathematics, staying constant at gap of 13) and increasing on the fourth (grade 4 mathematics, increasing from 16 to 17).

Changes over the same time frame in gaps tied to socioeconomic status among rural students were similarly mixed, with the gap narrowing on three measures (grade 4 reading, declining from a gap of 24 to a gap of 22; grade 8 mathematics, declining from a gap of 23 to a gap of 22; and grade 8 reading, declining from a gap of 20 to a gap of 18) and increasing on one measure (grade 4 mathematics, increasing from a gap of 19 to a gap of 20). Rural achievement gaps tied to socioeconomic status were by far the largest (in comparison with gender-based gaps and race-based gaps) for both grades and both subjects, before and after the COVID-19 period.

While the research literature does not yet offer rural-specific analyses of pandemic issues and their impact on teaching and learning, there is some limited research that—although not specific to rural schools and communities—does suggest insights that might inform the work moving forward. Early in the pandemic, a pre-pandemic study on shifts to online learning found that “...student learning was significantly impacted by stress, anxiety, illness, being forced to learn in a vastly different method than previously experienced, and the increased potential to fall behind due to lack of access to materials.”^{xxv} These stressors were borne differently by some groups, “the most vulnerable populations are falling further behind with online instruction. Some of these students have unstable housing or are homeless while others lack reliable internet access or computer accessibility”^{xxvi}

One study used summer learning loss literature and the analyses of learning losses following the 2005 Pakistan earthquake to illustrate how learning losses can accumulate over time. “The direct effect of the school closures alone cannot account for such large deficits in later test scores, suggesting affected children learned less each year after they regiment to school because of the short-term interruption...One possible explanation is that the curriculum and instruction did not adapt to the children’s lower learning levels upon

re-entry into school and hence the affected children fell farther and farther behind.”^{xxvii} This suggests that the impacts on learning of COVID-19-related closures will be felt for some time, even though classrooms are mostly back to face-to-face instruction. After modeling these accumulated losses, the study concluded that “if learning in grade 3 is reduced by one-third, roughly the amount of time many children are [during the pandemic] likely to be out of school, learning levels in grade 10 (compared to a counterfactual of the same children with no shock) are a *full year lower*.”^{xxviii} New models of intervention are needed as soon as possible to make up for lost instruction earlier to minimize the accumulation of learning loss. One such model, an “instruction reorientation strategy,” combines short-term remediation with long-term reorientation of instruction to children’s learning levels.^{xxix} That model not only erases learning losses, but places grade 10 students farther ahead than they would have been absent the shock of the pandemic. Famed educator Gloria Ladson-Billings notes, “normal is where the problems reside...‘going back’ is the wrong thing for children and youth who were unsuccessful and oppressed in our schools before the pandemic.”^{xxx}

More than just 2020 school closures, the shift to online learning may not have been significantly different on learning outcomes than outright closures. In surveys during the 2020 pivot to online instruction, teachers reported unpreparedness to teach online, and many districts focused their efforts only on math and ELA during that time.^{xxxi} “Teachers also taught less new material, especially in high-poverty schools.”^{xxxii} Student absenteeism was a further problem—an NCES report quantified this, stating “school leaders report[ing] increased student absenteeism as a COVID-19-related problem...across a wide range of school types, including in elementary schools (75%), schools with lower student poverty rates (73%), and rural schools (71%).”^{xxxiii}

If learning in grade 3 is reduced by one-third, roughly the amount of time many children are [during the pandemic] likely to be out of school, learning levels in grade 10...are a full year lower.

Not only did the stress associated with a change disproportionately impact vulnerable groups of students, but one study found that district-level schooling modes (in-person, hybrid, distance) disproportionately affected learning across different populations.^{xxxiv} Looking at 12 states’ reading test score data, the study found that declines in pass rates were more likely to be found in districts with less in-person instruction. More concerning, these declines were disproportionately strong in districts where the majority of students were students of color. No such difference was found in math scores. The researchers concluded that, “lost participation seems to disproportionately come from groups with generally lower test scores, this would suggest our estimates underestimate test score losses.”^{xxxv}

Technology access, including adequate computational devices and broadband internet, drove resource-related outcome gaps.^{xxxvi} The problem is not simply access to internet but adequate access to internet—that is, bandwidth sufficient to support two-way video chats and other graphics-intensive programs on sufficiently-sized screens. It is estimated that “9.7 million children nationwide do not have access to reliable internet in their homes.”^{xxxvii}

The pandemic impacts were felt by all, but safety nets and resource resilience were not distributed uniformly across the United States. The next section looks at the impacts of the pandemic on economic, social, and physical well-being. As in the previous section, we focus wherever possible on rural-specific impacts.

Well-being

Hunger, poverty, and other insecurities are highly impactful on learning. Twenty-first century teachers are called on to teach the whole child by attending to the well-being of children for whom they serve as ad hoc counselors, providers, and guardians. Rural teachers, especially, wear many hats, often teaching multiple subject areas, coaching, serving as nurses, and sometimes even bus drivers. Now, more than ever, schools provide these “wraparound services.” Hence, any interrogation of the impacts of the pandemic on rural schooling has to look at the contextual well-being of the students, teachers, and communities in which that schooling takes place. As one research pointed out, “Accessibility to academic resources, healthcare, mental health supports, food and nutrition, and safe places to learn were just a few of the challenges COVID-19 presented to the marginalized. In the context of the adapted hierarchy, all levels were impacted. For many CLD [Children living with Learning Disabilities] and low-SES students, schools provide mental and physical health support, food and nutrition, and safe, structured environments.”^{xxxviii}

Access to the wraparound services mentioned here depends on regular connection between the teacher and the student, and this was and is a significant challenge. Finding substitutes for teachers who were sick or who left the profession during the pandemic was a significant challenge. One report found that 77% of public schools experienced increased difficulty in finding substitutes during the pandemic.^{xxxix} Another found increased vacancies in teacher positions linked to the pandemic, especially in areas involving vulnerable populations such as students with individualized education plans.^{xl} The impact of vacancies on rural schools may be even greater in cases where there are one or few teachers in any given discipline or support area.

COVID-19 likely had impacts on the domestic experiences of rural children as well.^{xli} When the school-student connection is strained or gone, so too are the outside monitors of student well-being within

the home. Many factors amplify these effects in rural areas, including the lack of affordable childcare present even pre-pandemic, placing an added responsibility on working parents to find adult supervision so that the parents might work. Fifty-eight percent of rural areas experience “childcare deserts.”^{xlii} Multiple factors exacerbate the effects of COVID-19 in rural communities. According to one researcher:

“Across rural America, the lack of childcare is exacerbated by a geography that makes it infeasible to serve most children in large, centralized childcare centers. There’s no public transportation; parents might have to drive 30 miles to get to a childcare center in town. And for those who work second or third shift at a manufacturing plant, or a prison, or at a shipping warehouse—the kinds of employers often found in rural areas—a childcare center that’s open from 8 to 6 isn’t an option.”^{xliii}

For many students, school is the primary source of nutritious meals. Even before the pandemic, rural students experienced greater levels of food insecurity than their non-rural peers; however, the pandemic further expanded this gap.^{xliv} Nutrition and behavior are linked in ways that are still being uncovered. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the socio-emotional development of students in public schools was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to 87% of the schools surveyed. According to the same survey, 84% of public schools agreed or strongly agreed that students’ behavioral development has also suffered negative consequences.^{xlv} This is just one data point potentially linking nutrition and mental health both across the United States generally and especially in rural places.

Even before the pandemic, access to mental and physical health resources (a false distinction) was already challenging in rural places. Hospital closures and difficulty attracting and retaining qualified medical professionals became an even greater issue during the pandemic. With more than 100 rural hospitals closed

since 2005,^{xlvi} it is not surprising that “more than two-thirds of public schools reported an increase in the percentage of students seeking mental health services from school since the start of the pandemic”^{xlvii} and that “higher percentages of public schools and rural and town locations than in suburban locations strongly disagreed that their school can effectively provide mental health services to all students in need.”^{xlviii} Drivers of the surge in mental health needs included “stress, anxiety, illness, being forced to learn in a vastly different method than previously experienced.”^{xlix} One study of health and economic factors on rural well-being observed that “the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural populations have been severe, with significant negative impacts on unemployment, overall life satisfaction, mental health, and economic outlook.”^l Rural areas are more vulnerable than non-rural areas given issues of persistent poverty, lack of access to broadband internet as well as mental/health care.^{li} Particularly harsh effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were found in rural areas on availability of part-time work.^{lii} Employment and resources are especially impactful on homelife satisfaction and security, nutrition, and school attendance. As such, these findings are especially concerning now and in the long run.

But a more direct challenge for rural students in the pandemic is access to adequate technology, both broadband access and computing technology. Both rural areas and districts with high relative percentages of children living in homes below the federal poverty line had high numbers of families reporting limited access to educational technologies both in school and at home.^{liii} The digital divide of the past has become a need for participating in school life and the economy more broadly; it is not yet to be found on Maslow’s hierarchy or adapted hierarchy,^{liiv} but during quarantine and social isolation, the best fed and healthiest student could not participate in learning without broadband access able to handle basic video conferencing. While bringing broadband access to every corner of the United States is likened by politicians to rural

electrification, thus far the will to act and to allocate funds has not happened. Fully one-third of rural adults said that they did not have access to the internet at home as of 2020.^{liv}

With more than 100 rural hospitals closed since 2005... “more than two-thirds of public schools reported an increase in the percentage of students seeking mental health services from school since the start of the pandemic”...

Conclusion

We are at the beginning of understanding on any broad scale how the COVID-19 pandemic affected teaching and learning, let alone being able to make confident claims about the specific effects in rural areas. The pandemic required rapid changes, resilience, coping, ingenuity, compromising, and more. The one thing of which there is no doubt is that rural education did not escape COVID-19 impacts. Comprehensive, publicly available data are only now starting to emerge even as teaching and learning are having to find ways to respond to the consequences of pandemic disruptions. We expect the emerging data will offer far greater insight into these changes, exposing not only areas of concern requiring immediate attention and significant spatial inequities, but also positive consequences that speak to how rural pandemic responses may have changed education and related supports for learning and wellness for the better.

Alignment of Why Rural Matters 2023

to the National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) has been a voice for rural education since its founding in 1907. By highlighting the success of rural schools and communities and calling attention to challenges, NREA has a mission to promote rural vitality. Notably, for the first time, NREA is the host organization for the Why Rural Matters report, which was previously sponsored by another rural advocacy organization, The Rural School and Community Trust. With NREA's 2022 release of the National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027,^{lvi} the collaboration between NREA and Why Rural Matters could not be better timed. With NREA's Rural Research Agenda forefront in our minds from the beginning of planning for Why Rural Matters 2023, we specifically tailored the report to answer the rural research agenda's call for research that investigates educational and spatial equity, while also highlighting strengths-focused, innovative rural practices.

Although the *Why Rural Matters* report has been and remains a nonpartisan reporting of rural successes and challenges, the creators of the *Why Rural Matters* report would be remiss in not recognizing the ongoing political divisiveness that continues to create large rifts between rural and non-rural communities in the United States and discord within rural communities themselves. In the current political climate, rural people and places face greater scrutiny than ever before, often experiencing stereotypes that separate rural people and places from productive discussions about the very real challenges they experience, as well as diminishing possible platforms for showcasing rural innovation and success that can make important contributions across educational locales — rural or

non-rural. These tensions reveal an imperative for rural educational research about practices that increase access to rural educational opportunities and the need to bring rural strengths and successes into focus across the United States. In this section of the *Why Rural Matters* report, we describe the NREA Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 and provide an analysis of how this *Why Rural Matters* report is aligned to the new NREA Research Agenda. An understanding of the alignment of these two important pieces of work is relevant for any educational partners who are interested in the next steps that are needed to advance equity and opportunity in rural education research and practice.

The Ongoing Rural Research Imperative

The call for more research about rural education is not new. Rural education scholars have noted the significant lack of research about rural educational settings for decades, repeatedly calling for an increase in the amount of educational research that is specifically attentive to the unique challenges and strengths of rural people and places. In 1995, rural researcher Alan DeYoung wrote, “Rural American schools still educate almost 28% of the nation’s children, but only educational historians and rural sociologists have paid much attention to issues and dynamics of such places.”^{lvii} A decade later, Michael Arnold reported, “For all practical purposes, the knowledge base about important rural education issues is nonexistent.”^{lviii} Calls for rural research continued in the first quarter of the 21st century^{lix} and were periodically punctuated with specific research agendas that were designed to increase the amount of rural education research.^{lx, lxi}

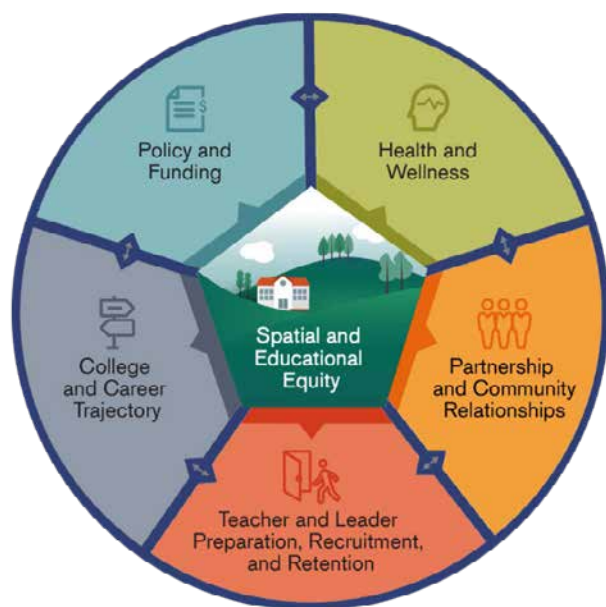
In recognition of the pressing need for rural education research, the *Why Rural Matters* reports have consistently provided rural education partners with essential research that identifies the strengths and needs of rural schools and communities on a state-by-state basis for nearly a quarter of a century. The first edition of *Why Rural Matters* appeared in the *Journal of Research in Rural Education* in 2000 and was the first report of its kind to specifically provide an analysis of rural education in each of the 50 states.^{lxii} Since then, the report has appeared nearly biannually, each edition continuing the original report’s goal of “bringing rural schools and communities into focus.”^{lxiii} With each iteration seeing hundreds of citations in research journals and policy reports and an unknowable number of citations in grant requests and other informal outlets, the report has for decades provided data that educators, researchers, and policymakers have used to advocate for impactful resources, supports, and opportunities for rural children and communities.

In 2016, NREA joined the effort to advance rural education research with the release of its first official Rural Research Agenda 2016–2021.^{lxiv} The NREA Research Agenda – 2016–2021 was comprehensive and described 10 broad research priorities that permitted researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to identify the issues that were most important in their school or community’s context. Although NREA’s Rural Research Agenda 2016–2021 was still focused on increasing the amount of research that was focused on rural locales, the agenda also pointedly stated that, “Equity in educational opportunity lies at the heart of our mission as an organization and serves as a guiding principle for our research agenda.”^{lxv} NREA’s first research agenda launched a formal call for charting a research path that was continued by the release of the organization’s second rural research agenda in 2022.

NREA's Rural Research Agenda

2022–2027

The National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 fully highlights the organization's mission of increasing access to educational opportunities. This research agenda is a call to action that asks educational partners to examine the ways that educational and spatial equity create challenges and spur innovation in rural education contexts.^{lxvi} The research agenda was drafted as a result of an extensive research project that was responsive to participants' perceptions of rural research priorities.^{lxvii, lxviii} The agenda centers Spatial and Educational Equity with five additional interconnected themes circling the core category—Policy and Funding; Teacher/Leader Recruitment, Retention, and Preparation; College and Career Trajectory; Community Partnerships and Relationships, and Health and Wellness.^{lxix} The goal of the new research agenda is to shed light on innovative rural practices, address unique rural challenges, and continue to build on the strengths of rural people and places through an intersectional lens of Educational and Spatial Equity.^{lxx, lxxi} The core category, Spatial and Educational Equity, is a term that may be new to many, but its definition will likely be familiar.



Spatial equity is the way that equity is linked to place and explicitly refers to how resources of all types are allocated, how services are distributed within rural schools and communities, and the way rural people are able to access educational opportunities. In rural education, spatial inequity is exacerbated by policies that impact funding systems, access to early intervention supports, opportunities for interdisciplinary learning experiences, the availability of mental health services, access to reliable broadband, and much more (see Figure 1 for examples of rural spatial inequities).

Rural places have long been incubators of innovative practices that use scalable models to positively impact student learning and community well-being. Yet, for decades rural places and people have experienced significant spatial inequities, ones that are compounded by the intersection of educational inequity that is present across all educational locales.^{lxxii} It is possible to trace causes of spatial inequities, as well as to identify where spatial inequities intersect with other forms of educational inequity. What is of significant concern, however, is calling attention to the outcomes that are created by patterns of inequity that lead to longstanding and persistent challenges for rural children, schools, and communities. The need to report the ways that spatial equity/inequity impacts rural education across states is at the heart of what the many *Why Rural Matters* reports have reported over the decades. The *Why Rural Matters* reports have always described disparate access to educational resources and opportunities across rural contexts. Now, informed by NREA's Rural Research Agenda, *Why Rural Matters 2023* continues to identify and highlight examples and patterns of rural educational inequities that demand consideration from policymakers while also highlighting areas of strength within the 50 states.

Developing *Why Rural Matters* 2023

When the new NREA Rural Research Agenda was released, work on *Why Rural Matters 2023* was just beginning, which allowed the *Why Rural Matters* research team to respond purposefully to the rural agenda's research priorities. Since the first *Why Rural Matters* report was published in 2000, gauges and indicators used to determine state-by-state analyses have been reactive to current educational challenges and opportunities. Understanding trends and needs has always been an important factor in determining which indicators comprise the *Why Rural Matters* featured gauges, and the authors of the *Why Rural Matters* reports have always used current research to determine which direction to take in analyzing rural education indicators.

The first *Why Rural Matters* report debuted with two gauges: *Rural Importance* and *Rural Urgency*,^{lxxiii} and by

the time the *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019* report was released, the report contained the two original gauges, as well as three additional gauges.^{lxxiv} Over time, the indicators used to calculate each gauge have also evolved depending on the availability of rural education data. For example, in the *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019* report, in calculating the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge, the report's researchers moved away from using the number of rural students receiving free or reduced lunches due to a recognition that many schools now provide all students with an opportunity to receive discounted lunches.^{lxxv} Now, the release of NREA's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 provides a unique opportunity to align to the most current research available regarding pressing research priorities. In the section that follows, a description of how this iteration of *Why Rural Matters* is aligned to NREA's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 is discussed.

FIGURE 1 Rural Spatial Inequity Examples



BROADBAND ACCESS

- Limited ability to participate in virtual school options
- Decreased access to research, learning applications, and other online learning resources
- Reduced parent/caregiver access to school events
- Reduced access to teacher and school communications



TRANSPORTATION

- Increased distance to health care services
- Increased time spent on bus rides to and from school and/or school-supported extracurricular activities
- Inequitable dispersal of state funding for school transportation costs



STAFFING

- Challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers and school leaders
- Issues in staffing of school support personnel, including counselors, bus drivers, nurses, speech/language pathologists, and others
- Lower pay for leaders, teachers, and other support staff

Alignment of *Why Rural Matters*

to NREA's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027

Why Rural Matters 2023 represents an intentional alignment to NREA's Rural Research Agenda and a recognition of the importance that Spatial and Educational Equity have in determining the overall condition of rural education in the 50 states and states' ability to meet the diverse needs of rural children and families. Throughout each of the five gauges, *Why Rural Matters 2023* highlights a clear connection to the research agenda's core theme of Spatial and Educational Equity, as well as to the intersection with the research agenda's five supporting themes. *Why Rural Matters 2023* has five gauges: 1) *Importance*, 2) *Student and Family Diversity*, 3) *Educational Policy Context*, 4) *Educational Outcomes*, and, 5) *Access to Supports for Learning and Development*. The first three gauges and their indicators are nearly identical to the last *Why Rural Matters* report. The fourth gauge, while maintaining a focus on educational outcomes, measures a different set of outcomes. The fifth gauge is completely new in this report (see the results section of this report for a more detailed description of each gauge and how its indicators were calculated). Whether new or unchanged, each gauge in the *Why Rural Matters 2023* report is connected to NREA's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027. To illuminate these connections, what follows next is a discussion of the how the five *Why Rural Matters* gauges align to the research agenda's core category of Spatial and Educational Equity and to the agenda's five intersectional supporting categories, which include policy and funding; teacher/leader recruitment, retention, and preparation; college and career trajectory; community partnerships and relationships, and health and wellness.^{lxxvi, lxxvii, lxxviii}



Importance Gauge

NREA's Rural Research Agenda calls for research that investigates funding through a lens of spatial equity. The *Importance* gauge speaks to this important measure of rural school access to supports and services. The *Importance* gauge includes five indicators that are used to determine the importance

of attending to rural education in each state. In general, a higher percentage of rural schools, students, and funding correlates to a higher ranking on the *Importance* gauge. Further connected to NREA's Rural Research Agenda and the *Importance* gauge, *Why Rural Matters 2023* illuminates some states that provide funding in spatially equitable ways, as well as others that have work to do to address spatial inequities. An examination of funding through a lens of spatial equity on a state-by-state basis provides the data the rural research agenda identifies as a research priority. In states with high *Importance* gauge rankings, awareness of funding and policy decision-making allows invested parties to address challenges that inhibit spatial equity.



Student and Family Diversity Gauge

The *Student and Family Diversity* gauge

provides an essential examination of the intersection between NREA's core theme of Spatial and Educational Equity and the Health and Wellness theme on the rural research agenda. The five indicators that comprise this gauge provide an investigation of *racial diversity*, *poverty*, *disability*, and *household mobility* (which is used as a potential indicator of housing insecurity). Of note, states with an “*Urgent*” measure on this indicator represent the highest levels of intersection between rural student measures of race, poverty, and disability. Conversely, states with more favorable scores on the *Diversity* gauge had much lower scores on the *rural diversity index* indicator (i.e., a measure of the chances of randomly selecting two students from a rural school who are of a different race/ethnicity), indicating an important intersection between Spatial and Educational Equity for rural students of color. This gauge continues to illuminate the intersectional nature of equity/inequity and highlights the importance of including spatial equity as a contributor to other educational equity challenges such as disability. The intersection of equity forms the core theme of NREA's Rural Research Agenda.



Educational Policy Context Gauge

Policy and Funding is one of the five themes of NREA's Rural Research Agenda, creating a direct link to the *Educational Policy Context* gauge. This gauge uses five indicators to examine the ways that policies impact funding for instruction, staffing, and transportation in rural schools. In rural educational settings, funding formulas have long been recognized as inequitable, exacerbating both Spatial and Educational Inequities.^{lxxxix, lxxx, lxxxi} The five indicators used in the *Educational Policy Context* gauge highlight the strong connection between equitable policy and funding and a state's overall educational well-being.

One of the indicators on this gauge examines the ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures, specifically the amount of money spent on instruction for every \$1 spent on transportation in rural districts. In rural contexts, funding for transportation has historically been an area of significant spatial inequity, with state funding formulas often failing to account for higher transportation costs in rural districts.^{lxxxii} Another indicator on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge is a measure of salary expenditures per the number of full-time equivalent teachers, which directly aligns to the rural research agenda's theme of Teacher and Leader Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention. Recruiting and retaining teachers is a serious concern across educational locales but is an issue of heightened concern in rural educational settings.^{lxxxiii} Teacher salaries impact a rural district's ability to recruit and retain teachers, and those teachers have a significant impact on the quality of the instruction that is delivered to children. As *Why Rural Matters 2023* illustrates, states that more equitably compensate their teachers fare better in their state's overall ranking. An analysis of policy and funding patterns is a major contributor to all *Why Rural Matters* reports, a need firmly supported by the research priorities outlined in NREA's Rural Research Agenda.



Educational Outcomes Gauge

The *Educational Outcomes* gauge is aligned with the rural research agenda in several ways. One of its main themes is College and Career Trajectory. This theme recognizes the importance of knowing what path students take when they leave high school. *Why Rural Matters 2023* addresses this in one of the five indicators used to determine the *Educational Outcomes* gauge. The rural advantage for high school indicator is a measure of the rural high school graduation rate minus the non-rural high school graduation rate. The *Educational Outcomes* gauge also examines the intersection of two areas of Spatial and Educational Equity in the rural research agenda, specifically the ways that poverty and rurality intersect to indicate educational outcomes through academic achievement measures. However, it must also be noted that NREA's Rural Research Agenda does not explicitly mention academic achievement as one of its goals, and instead highlights the connection to spatial equity (i.e., access to resources, supports, and opportunities) as the most essential indicator of rural students' academic success and well-being. The intersection of these issues is addressed in *Why Rural Matters 2023's* newest gauge: *Access to Supports for Learning and Development*.



Access to Supports for Learning and Development Gauge

Of the five *Why Rural Matters* gauges used to analyze the condition of rural education in the 50 states, arguably no gauge is better aligned to NREA's Rural Research Agenda 2022-27 than the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge. The research agenda was released when planning for *Why Rural Matters 2023* was beginning, which allowed for this new gauge to be specifically developed in order to be responsive to the research agenda using an assets- and strengths-focused design. With strengths-based perspectives driving

NREA's Rural Research Agenda and a core focus on Spatial and Educational Equity, the research agenda is a call to action to increase access to educational resources and supports, all of which are highlighted in *Why Rural Matters 2023's* fifth and final gauge.

To start, the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge aligns closely to the research agenda's theme of Health and Wellness and its intersection with Spatial and Educational Equity. The gauge's first indicator provides an average number of rural students per school counselor/psychologist in a district. Also connected to the Health and Wellness theme, the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge uses an indicator that reports the percent of uninsured school-aged children. Two other indicators in the gauge reveal a clear alignment between Spatial and Education Equity and other themes on the research agenda. First, the percent of rural enrollment in public preschools indicator connects Spatial and

Educational Equity to the research agenda's themes of Health and Wellness, College and Career Trajectory, and Policy and Funding. Despite research that supports preschool improving access to early intervention services, as well as a positive correlation to future success in school, funding policies often drive access to public preschool.^[xxxiv, xxxv, xxxvi, xxxvii] Second, the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge uses an indicator that reports enrollment of females in gifted education programs. Finally, an indicator that reported rural households that did not have access to broadband services was used in the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge. When considering the strong impact that access to resources, supports, and opportunities has on school success and the focus of these issues in NREA's Rural Research Agenda, the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge is essential for understanding the condition of rural education in each state.



Next Steps

No matter the location of their school or community, rural children in all 50 states deserve equitable access to educational resources, supports, and opportunities. This belief is what drives both *Why Rural Matters 2023* and the National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027. That children in rural schools receive fewer resources, supports, and/or opportunities due to the location of their school or to factors related to their unique identities as individuals speaks to one of the most inequitable conditions that impacts schooling in the United States. When considered through the intersection of Spatial and Educational Equity, it becomes clear that reports such as *Why Rural Matters 2023* are essential for answering the call to action created by the research agenda. All editions of *Why Rural Matters* are created with attention to specific rural contexts as a guiding practice. This time, the *Why Rural Matters* report was also designed to be responsive to the research priorities described in the research agenda. What becomes clear in an analysis of this report when considering the research agenda is that addressing issues of spatial inequity, with particular attention to the intersection of educational equity, must be at the forefront of all work in rural education. As one analyzes the findings presented in *Why Rural Matters 2023*, it is heartening to see many states doing well on a multitude of indicators, yet it is equally troubling to see the disparities that exist for rural children depending on the location of their school/district.

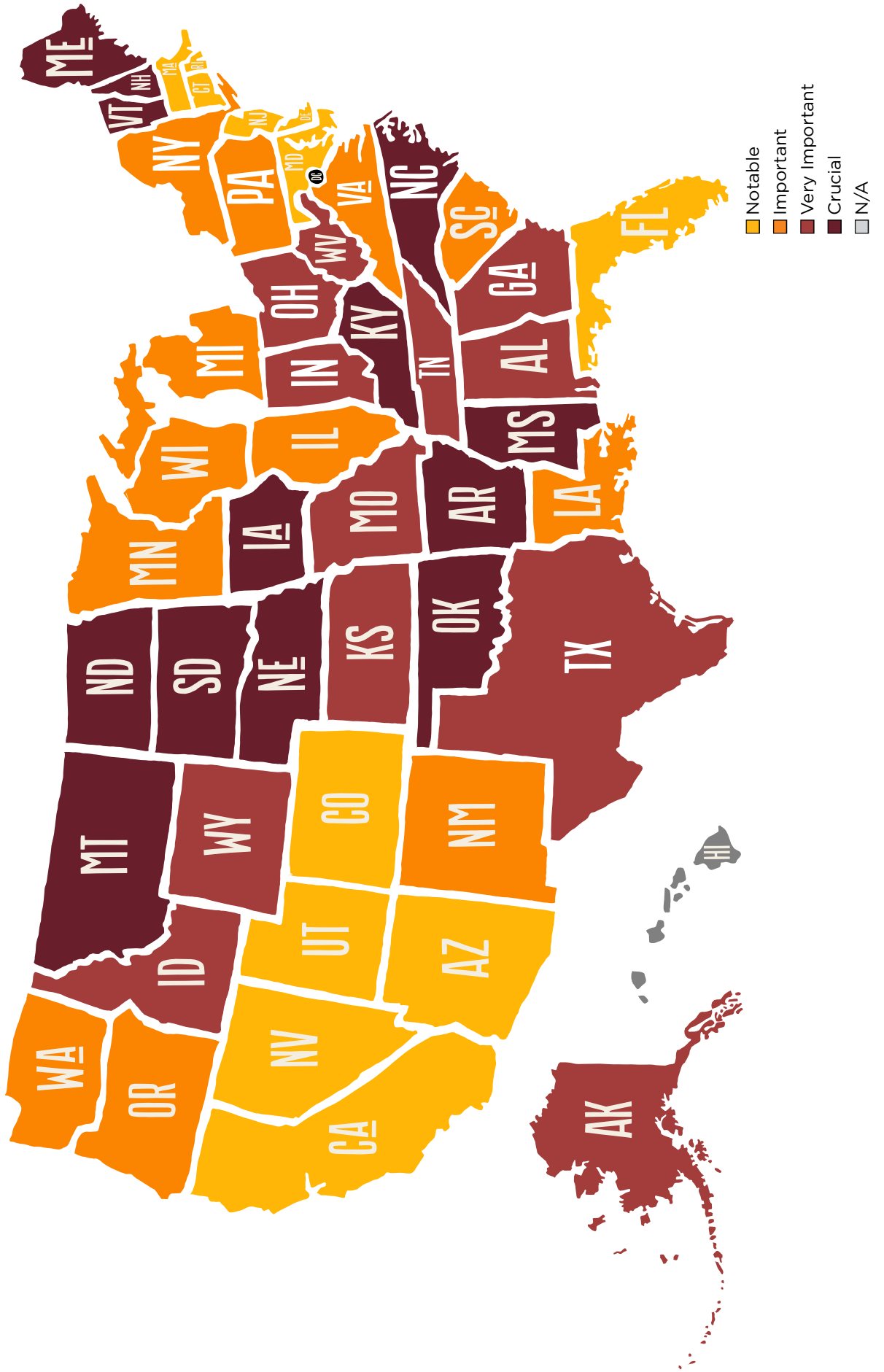
Why Rural Matters 2023 provides empirical analysis of trends and issues in rural educational settings across the 50 states. However, although this report helps to provide essential data related to most of the core themes of NREA's Rural Research Agenda, it does not highlight case-specific instances of innovative practices that are often highly impactful and broadly scalable to other rural locales. This is especially true in regards to the research agenda's theme of Partnerships and Community Relationships. With this in mind, the authors of *Why Rural Matters 2023* hope that rural education partners will use the data presented here to continue research that addresses NREA's research priorities. In particular, more work on the innovative practices that occur within rural schools and communities is needed through a variety of research methodologies including qualitative studies and studies with smaller numbers of participants. Innovative practices are often developed in order to address educational and spatial inequities or to capitalize on rural strengths in ways that intersect with all the themes presented in the research agenda. We hope that both the National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 and *Why Rural Matters 2023* provide a launching point for these studies and spur the reporting of the innovative practices that are occurring across rural educational settings.



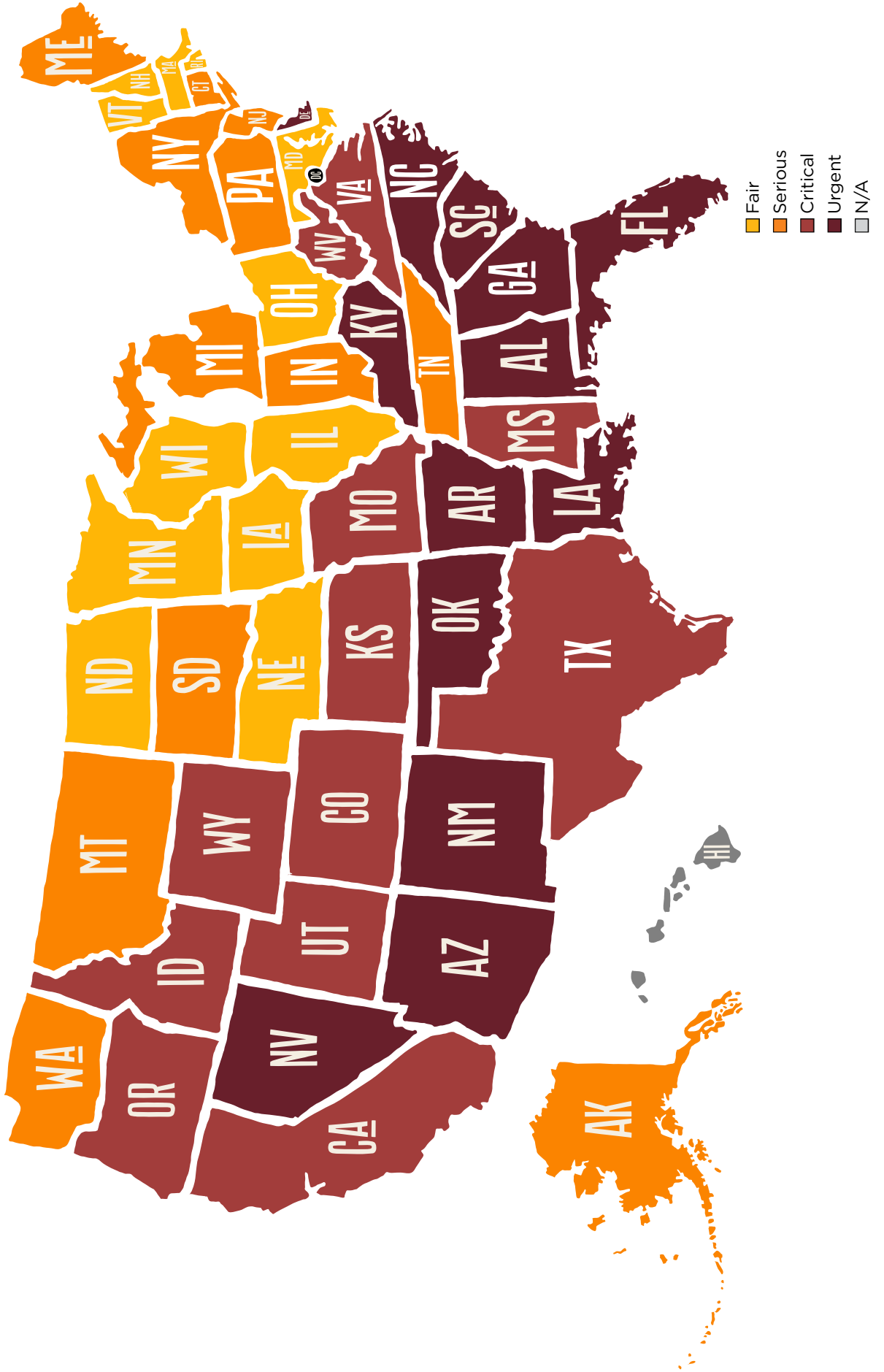
Maps of State Rankings



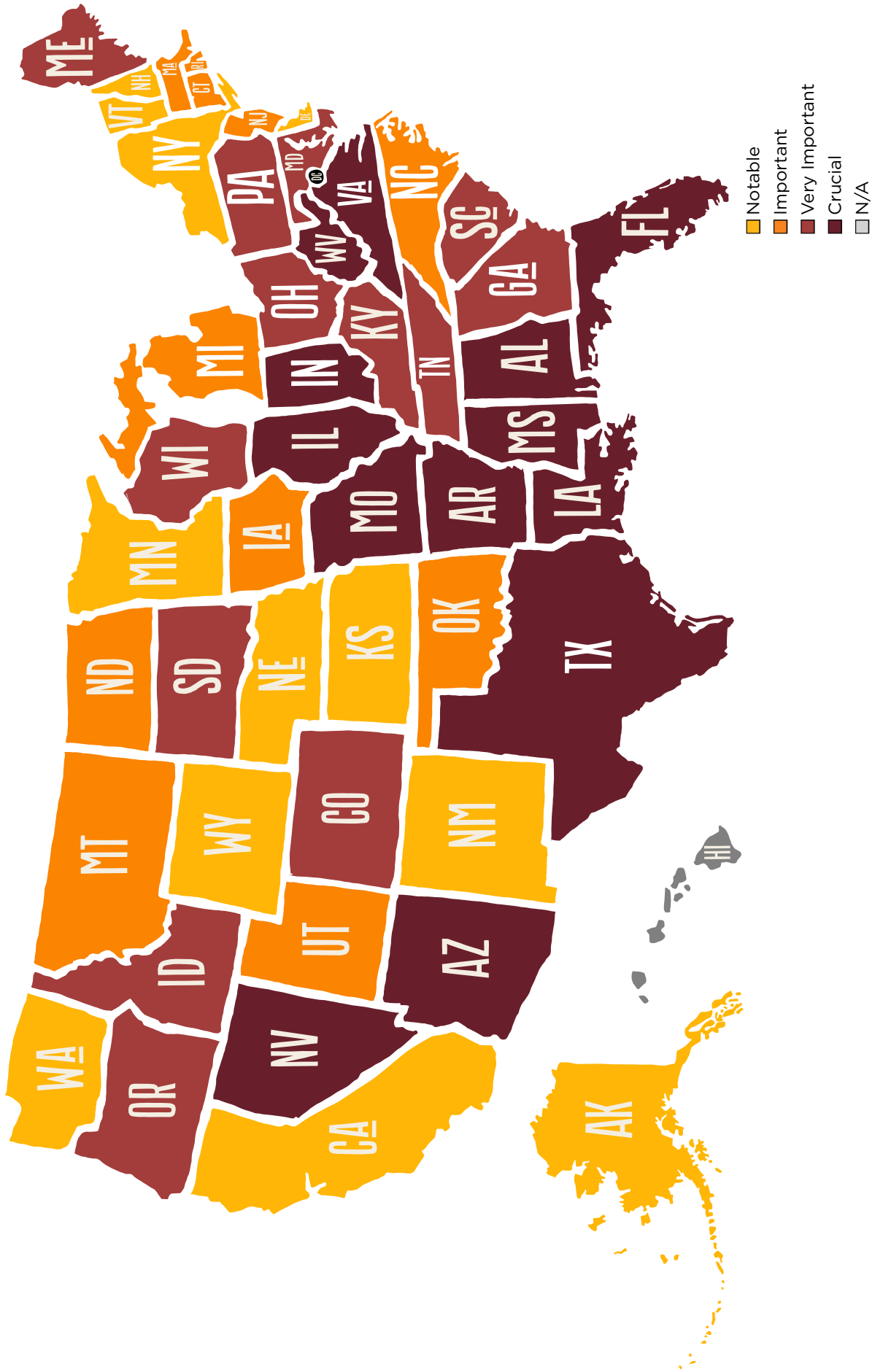
Importance Gauge



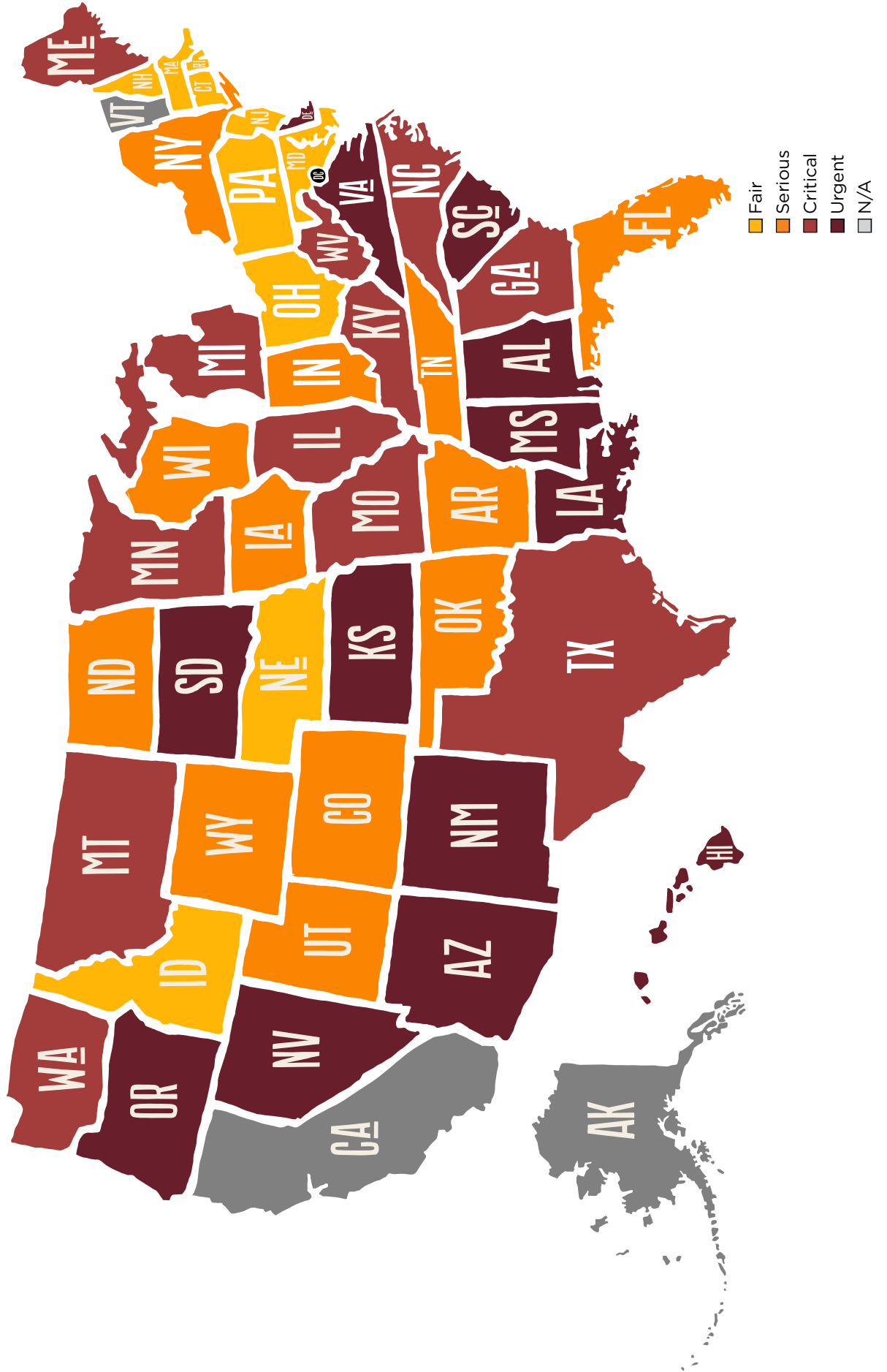
Student and Family Diversity Gauge



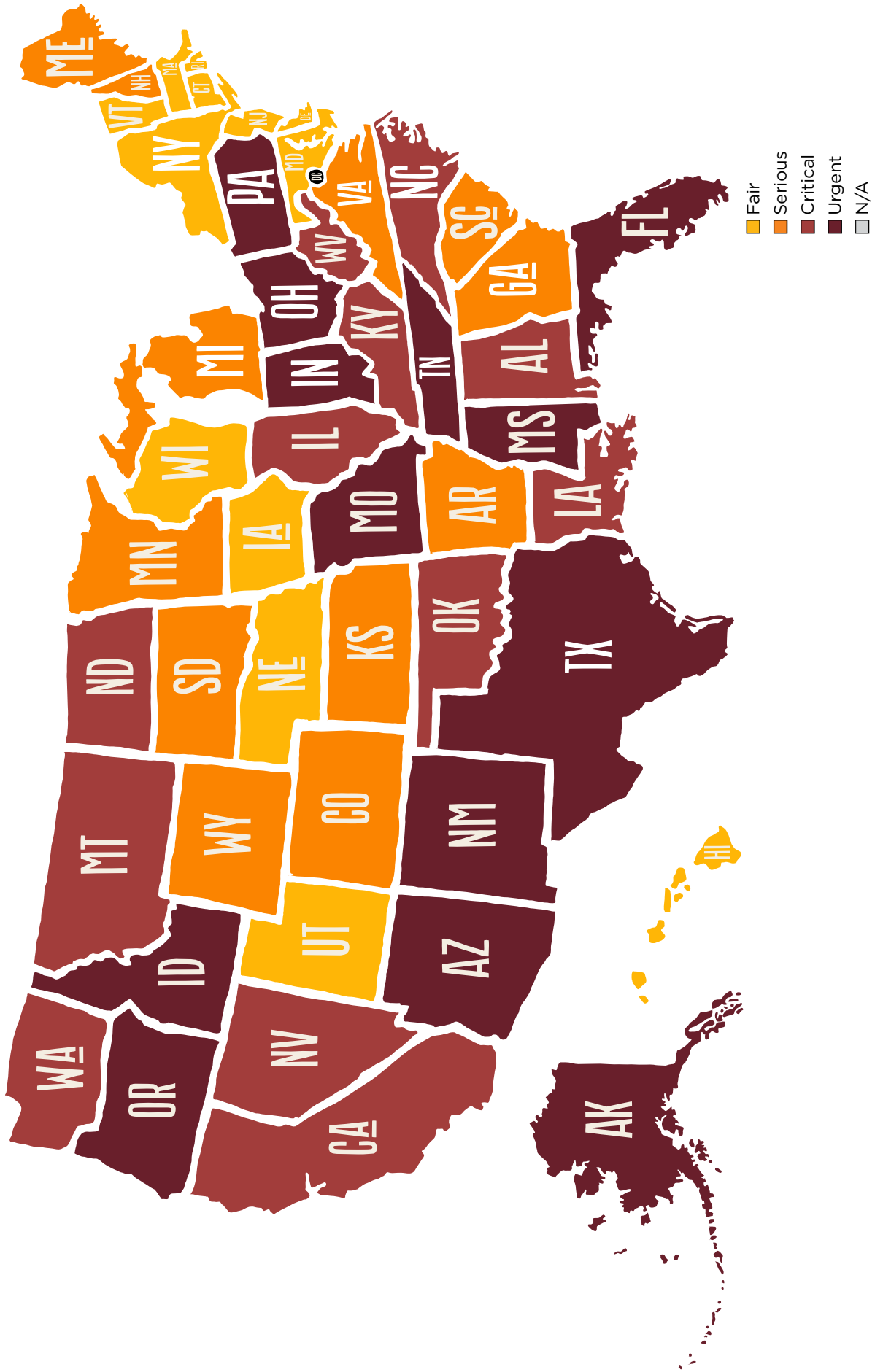
Educational Policy Context Gauge



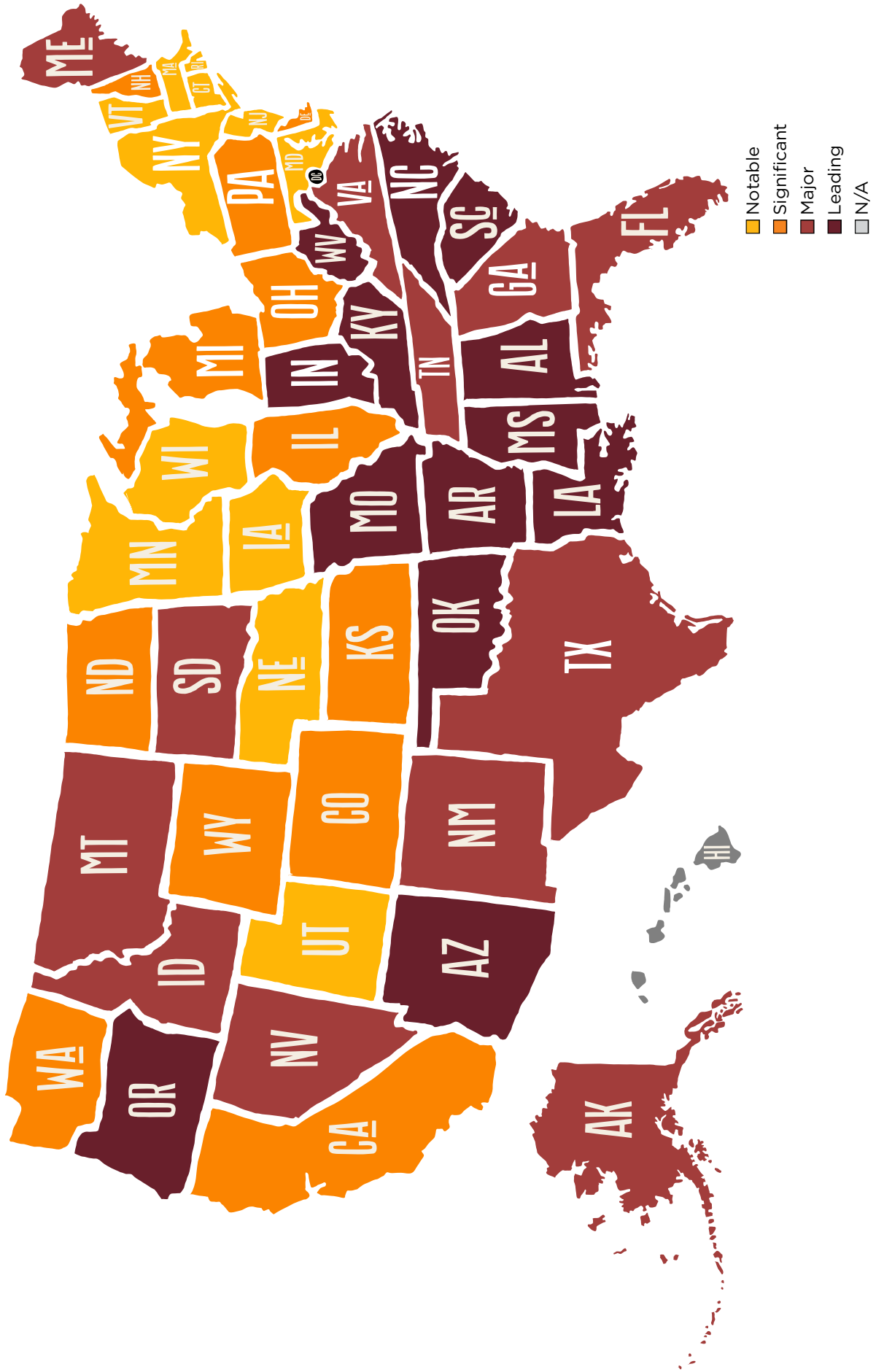
Educational Outcomes Gauge



Access to Supports for Learning and Development Gauge

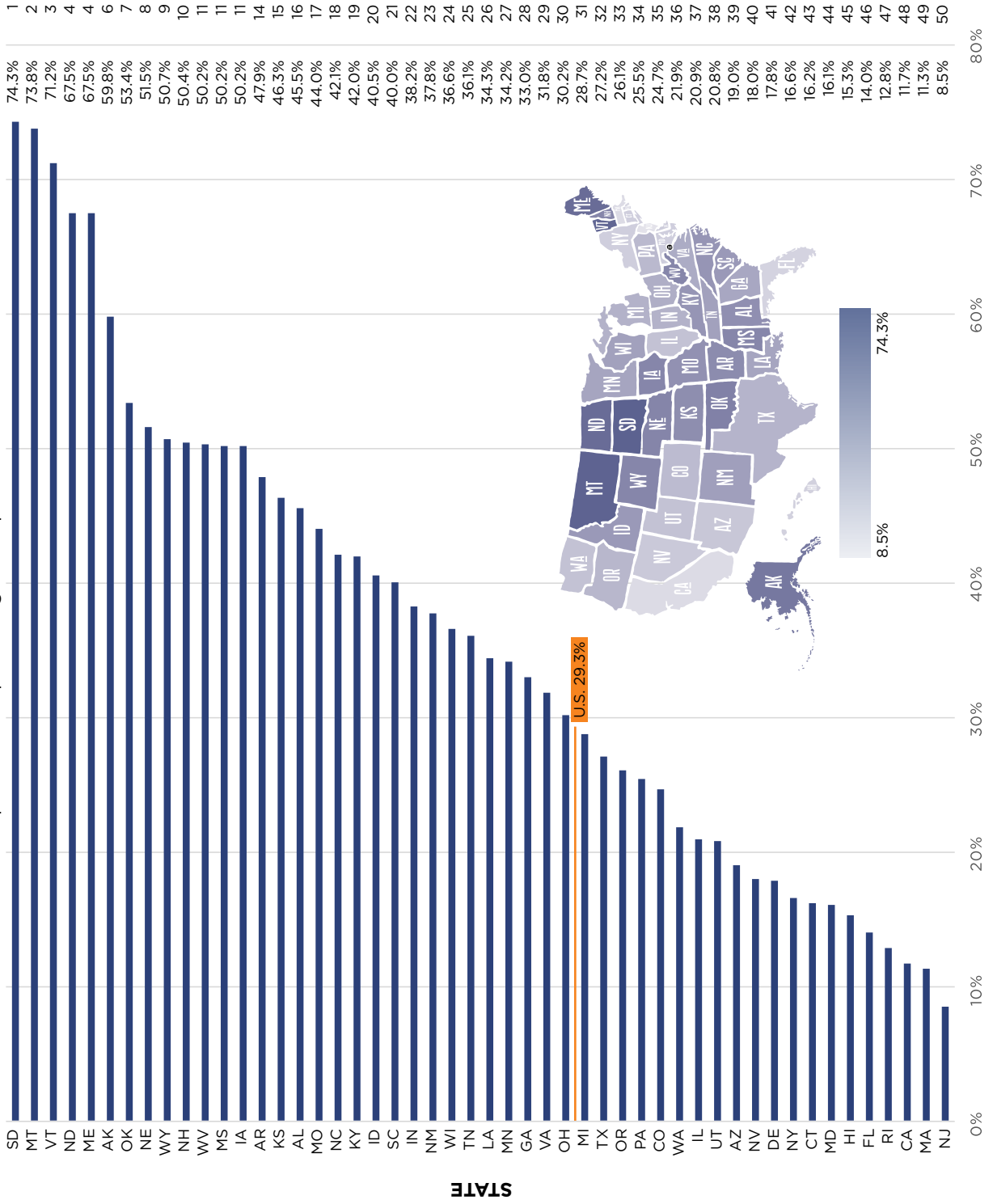


Priority Ranking



Percent Rural Schools

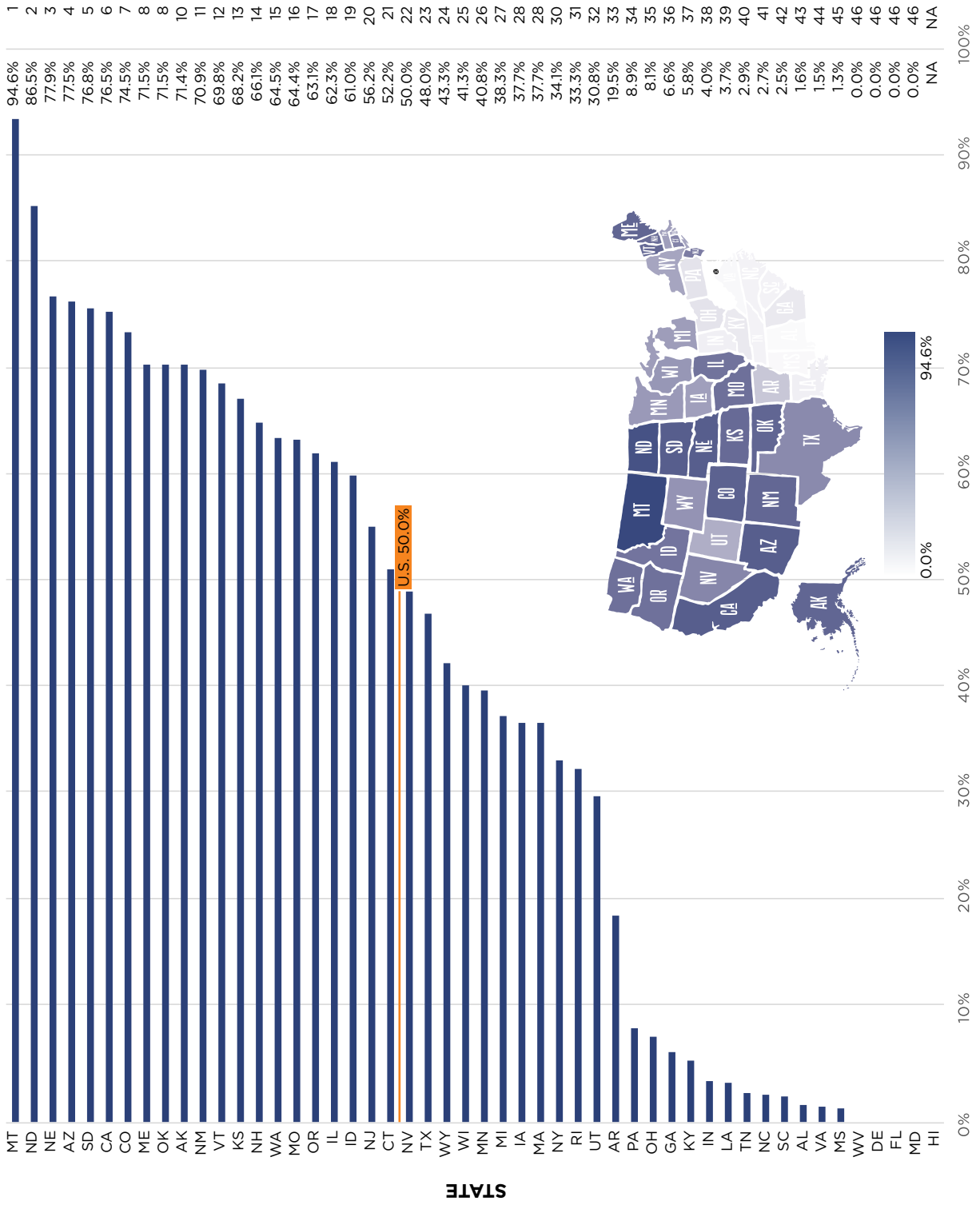
The number of public schools located in places classified as rural by the National Center for Education Statistics, expressed as a percentage of all public schools in the state.



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

Percent Small Rural School Districts

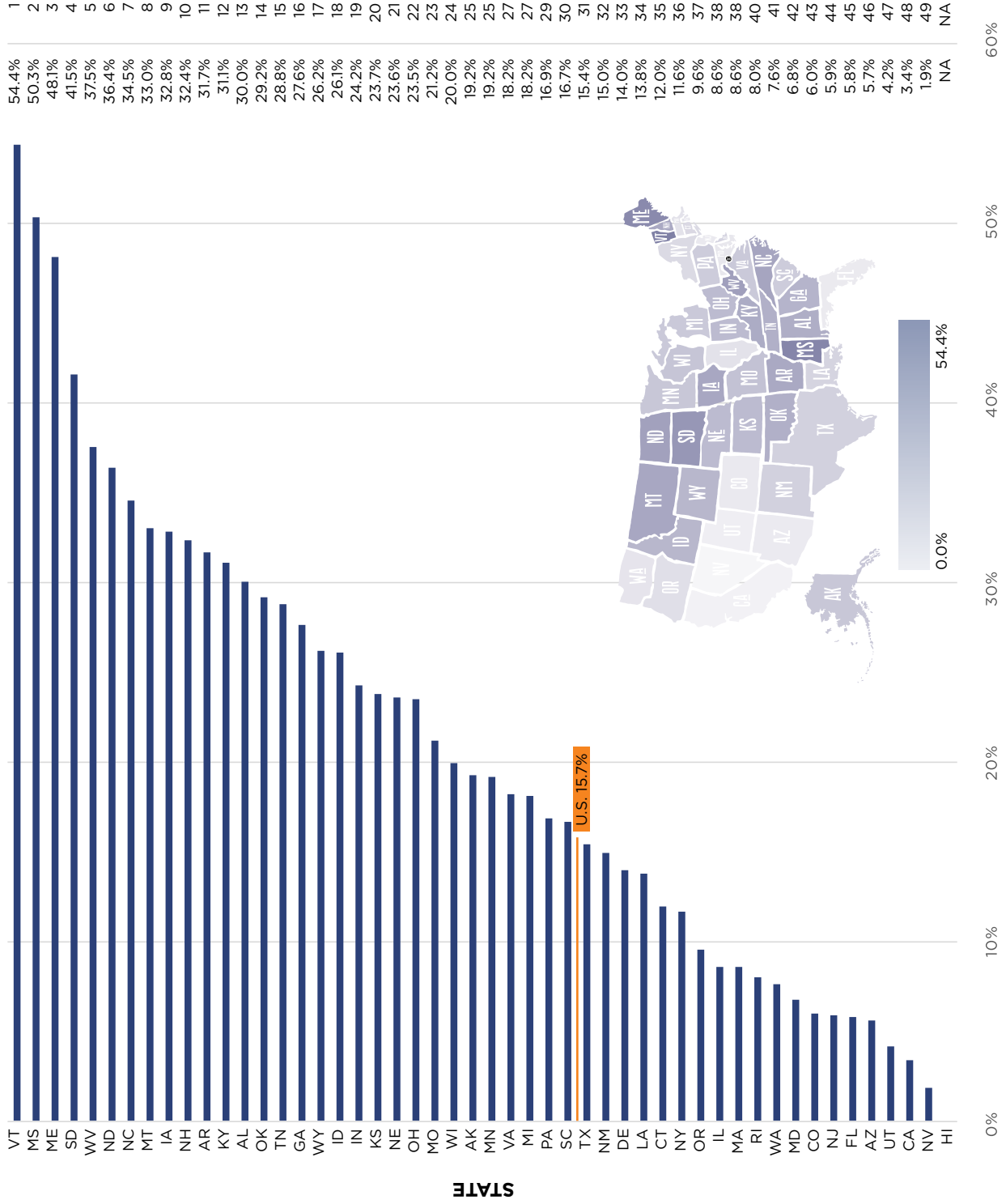
The number of rural public school districts with an enrollment size below the national median for rural districts (493 students), expressed as a percentage of the total number of public school districts in the state.



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

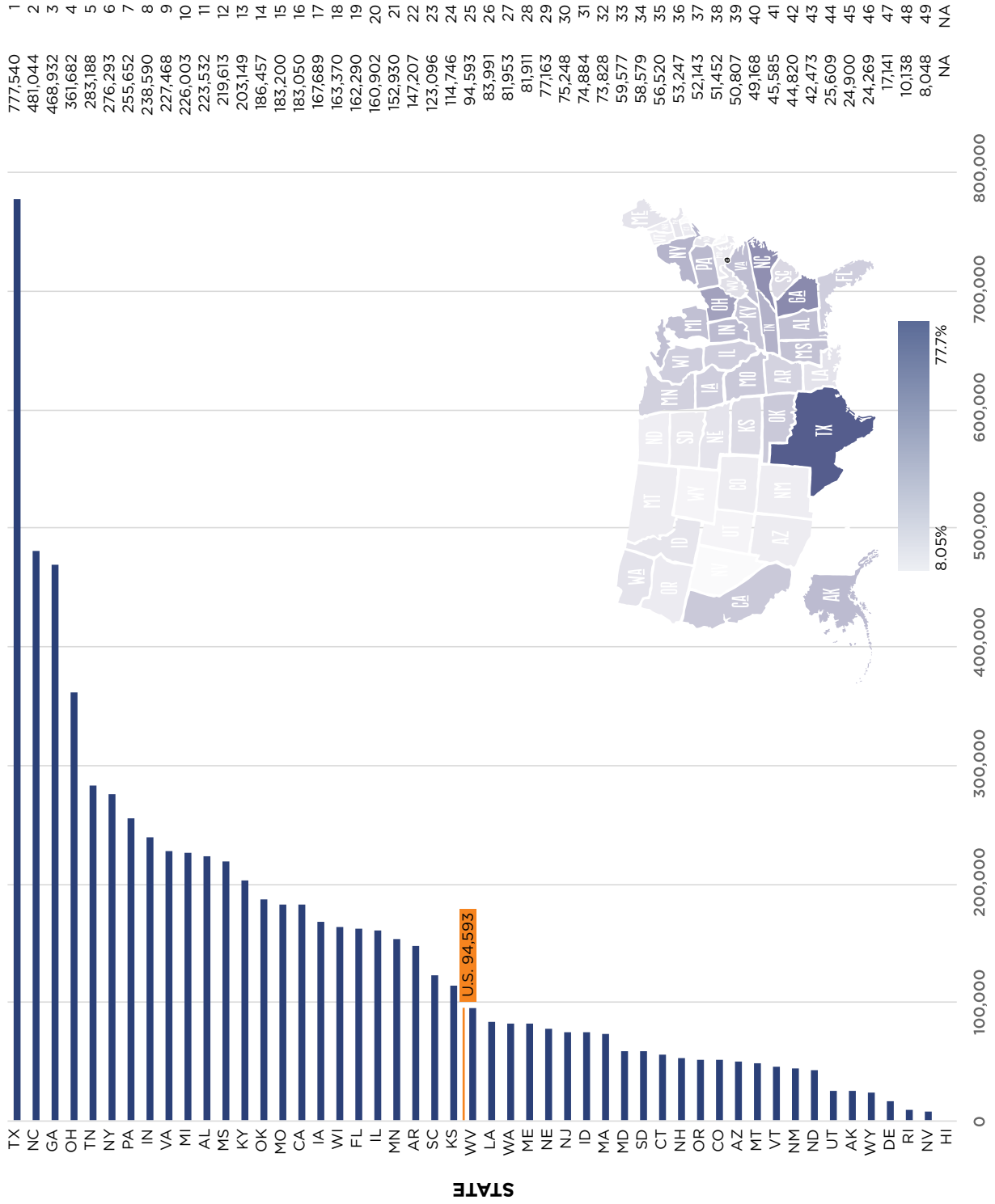
Percent Rural Students

The number of students attending public schools located in districts classified as rural by the National Center for Education Statistics, expressed as a percentage of all public school students in the state.



Number of Rural Students

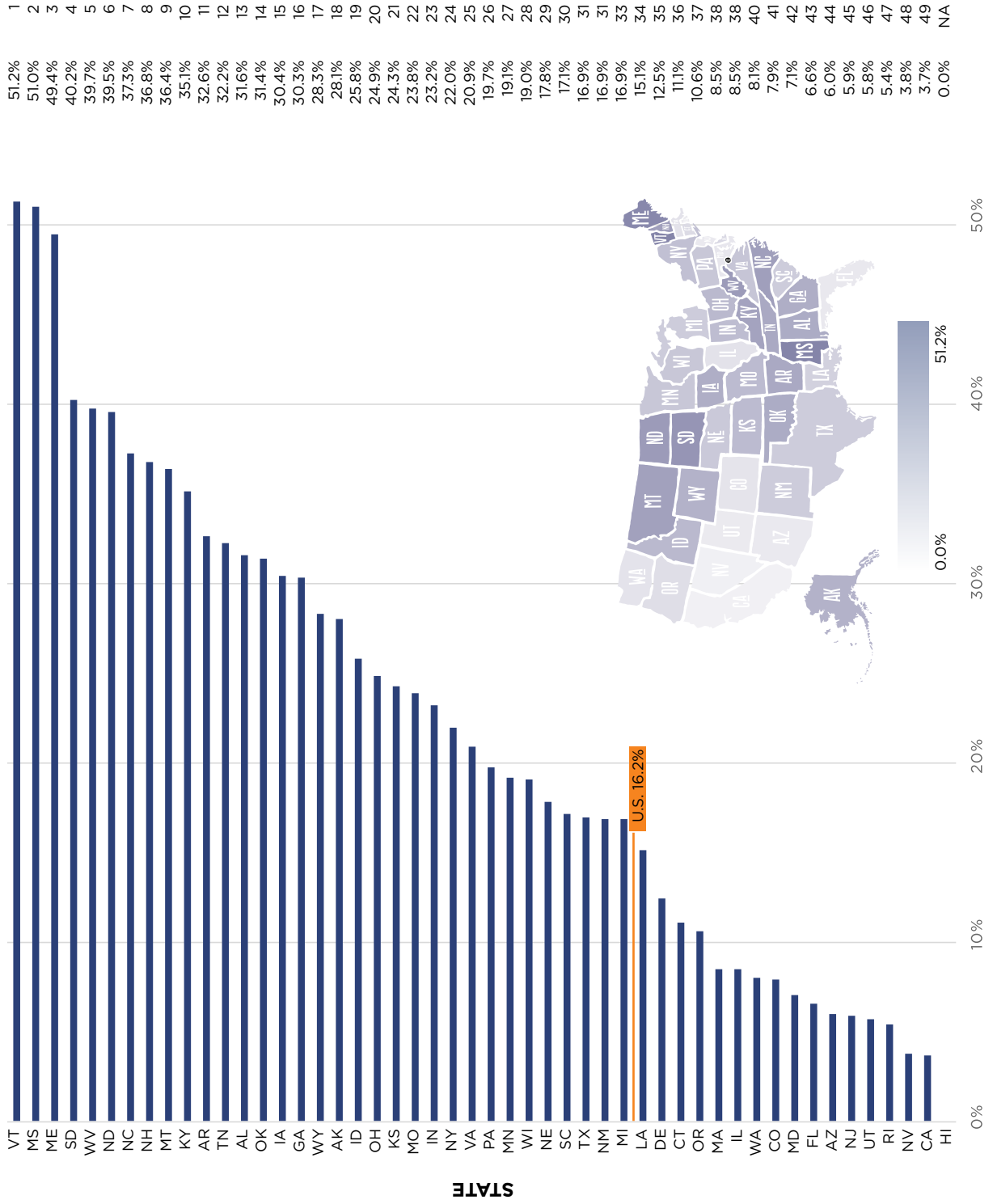
The number of students attending public schools located in a district classified as rural by the National Center for Education Statistics.



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

Percent of State Education Funds to Rural Districts

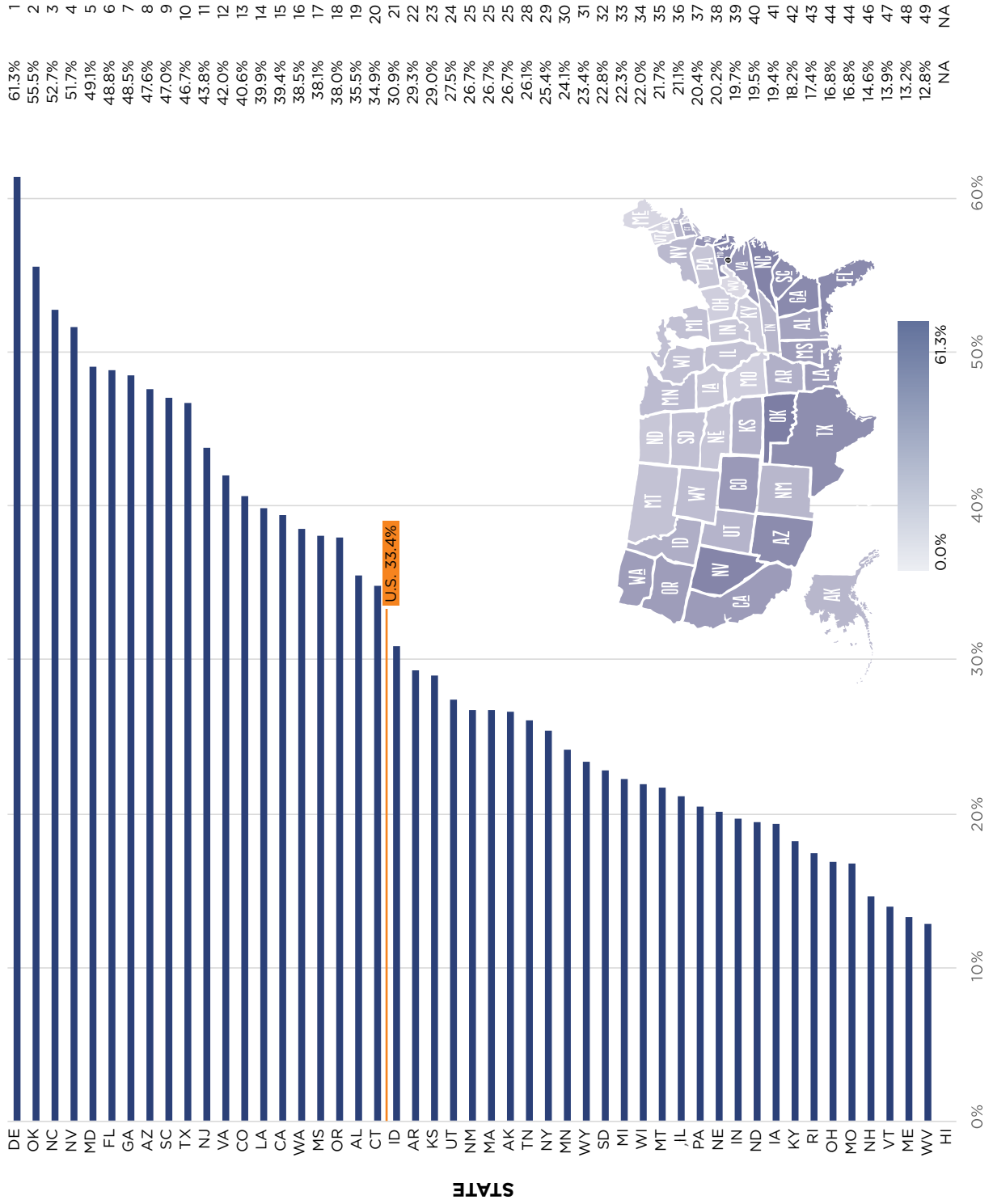
State education funding to local school districts located in rural settings, expressed as a percentage of all state education funding to local school districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2018-2019

Rural Diversity Index

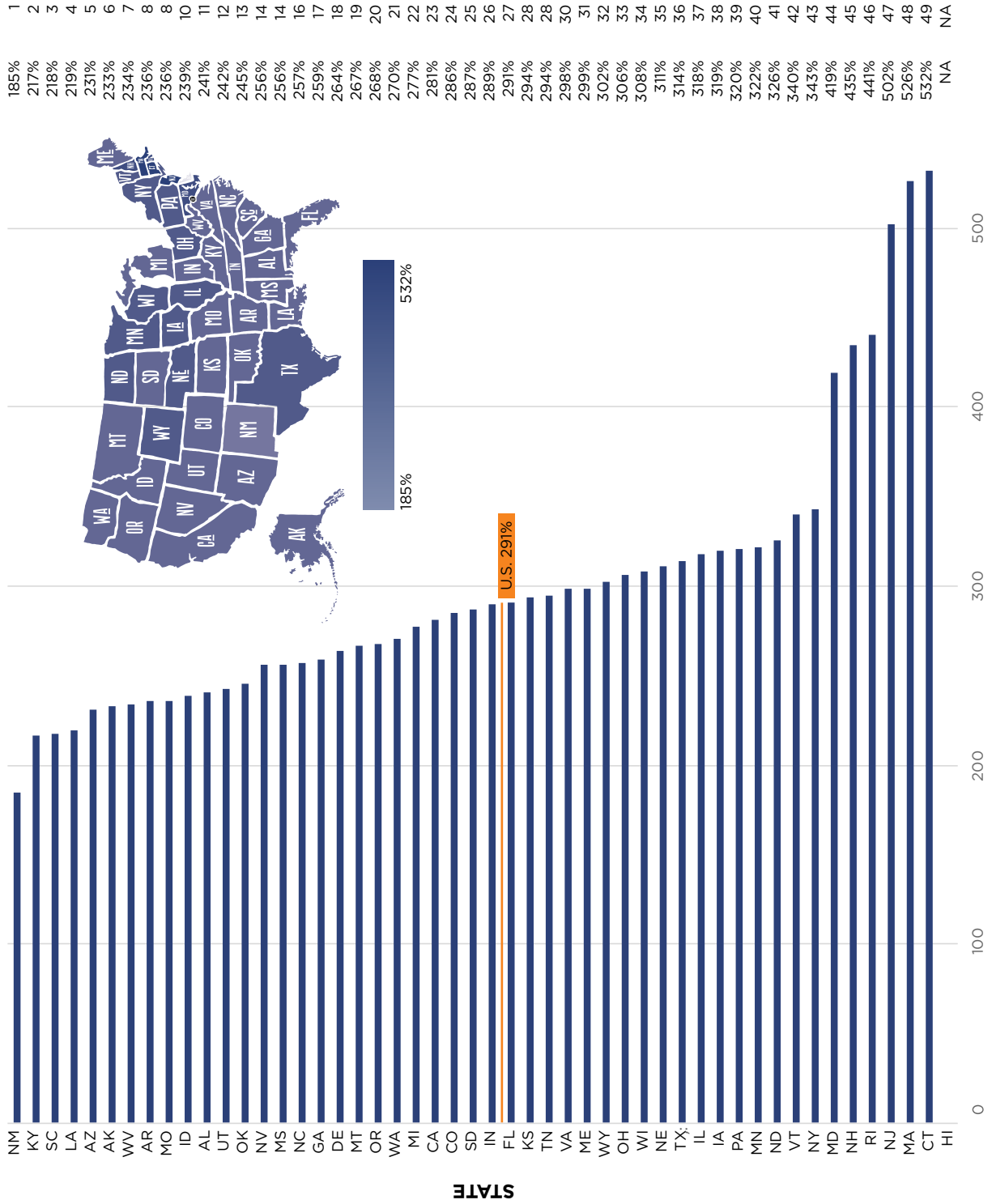
Given a randomly-chosen public school located in a rural district (weighted by school enrollment), and two randomly-chosen students within the school, this is the chance that the students will be of different races.



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

Poverty Level In Rural School Communities

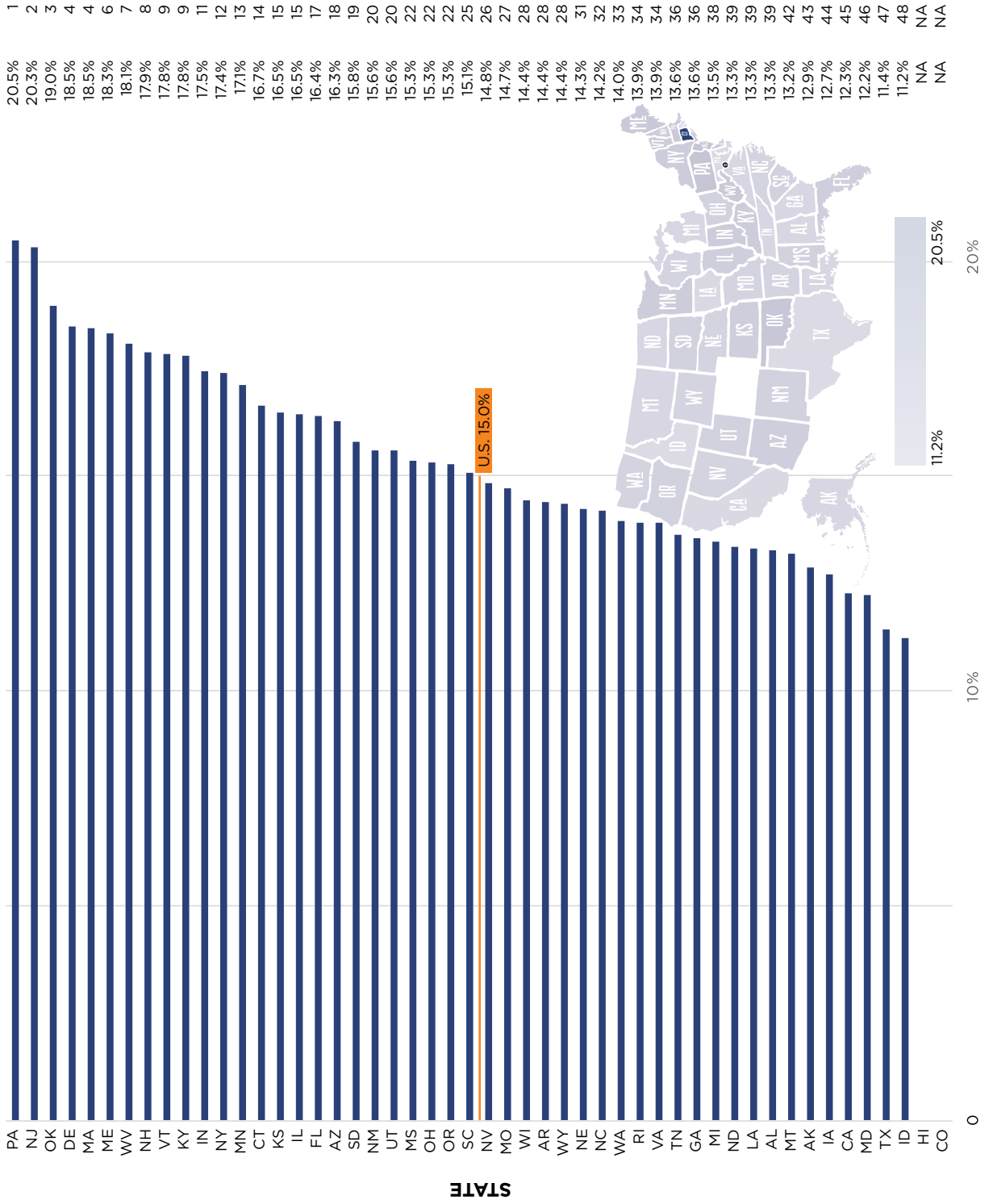
'A "school community" is defined as the 25 households with school-aged children measured in the American Community Survey who live nearest to a school within a rural district. Percentages represent the weighted average household income relative to the poverty threshold (represented as 100%). School level percentages are then aggregated up to the state level (using district enrollment as a weight).



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2019-2020; Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, 2019-2020

Percent Rural IEP Students

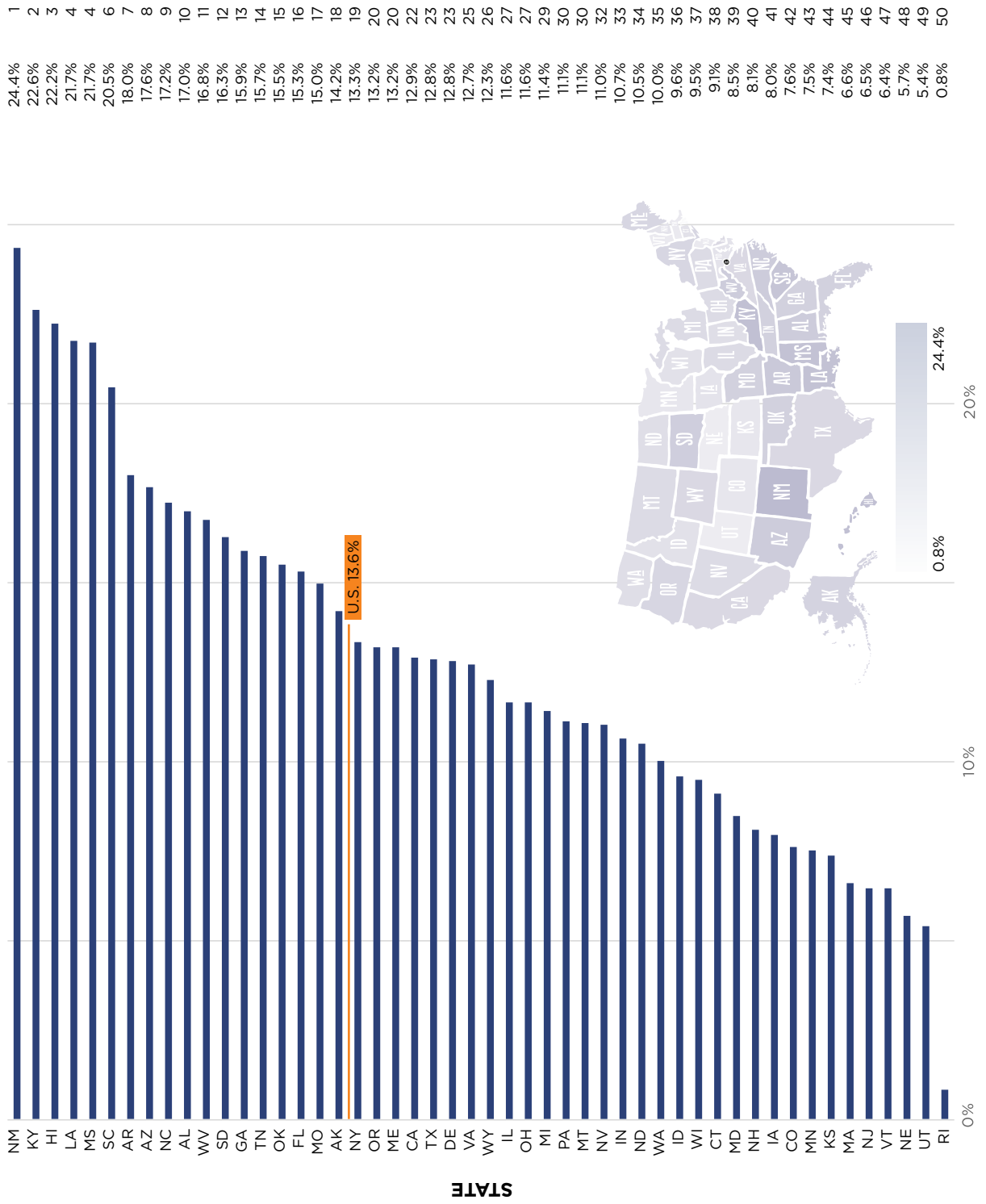
The total number of students who are enrolled in rural districts and receive special education services, expressed as a percentage of all students enrolled in rural districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2019-2020

Percent of Rural School-Aged Children In Poverty

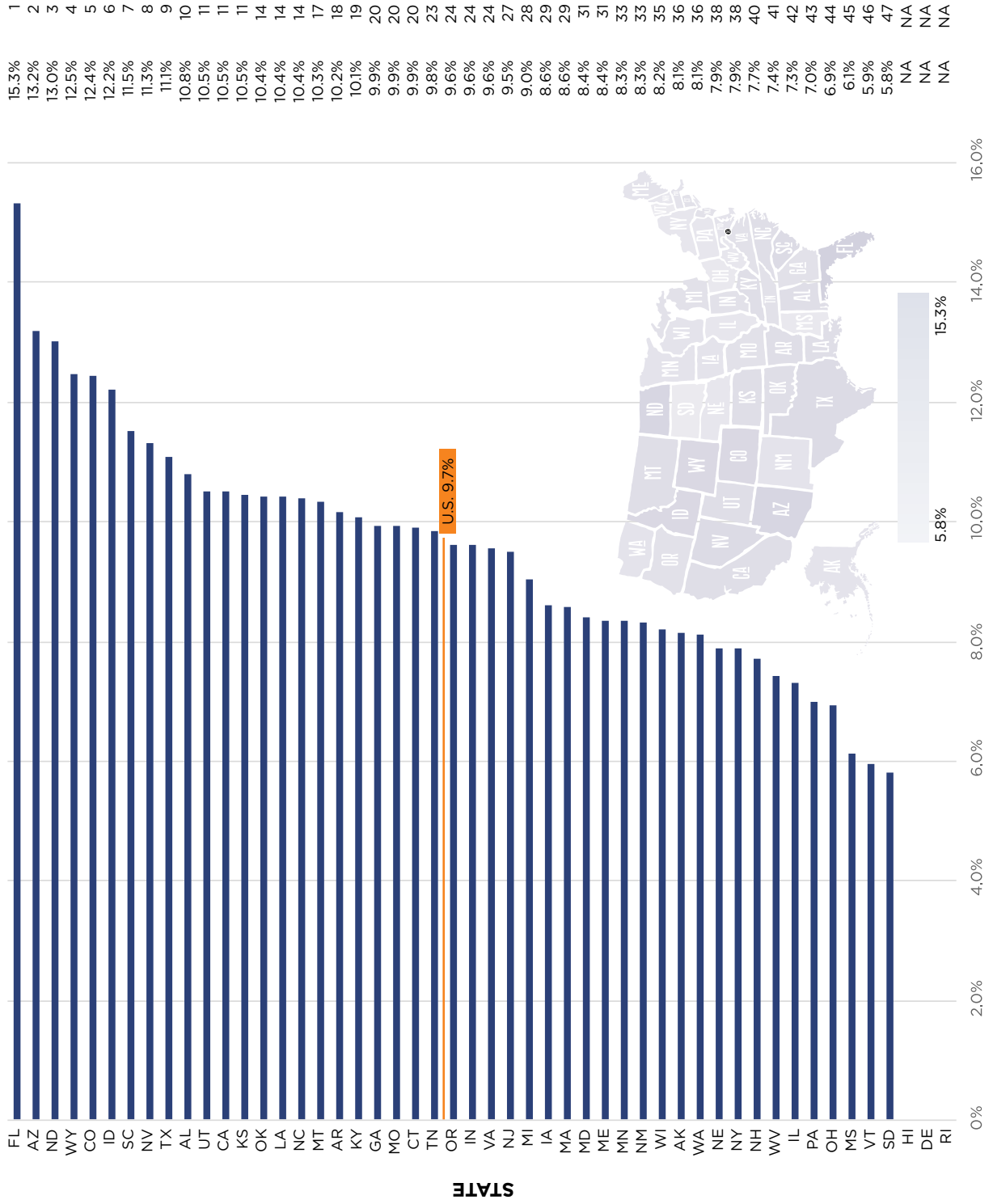
The number of children aged 5-17 who are living below the poverty threshold and in an area classified as rural by the National Center for Education Statistics, expressed as a percentage of all children aged 5-17 living in a rural area in the state.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (1-year estimates)

Percent of Rural Household Mobility

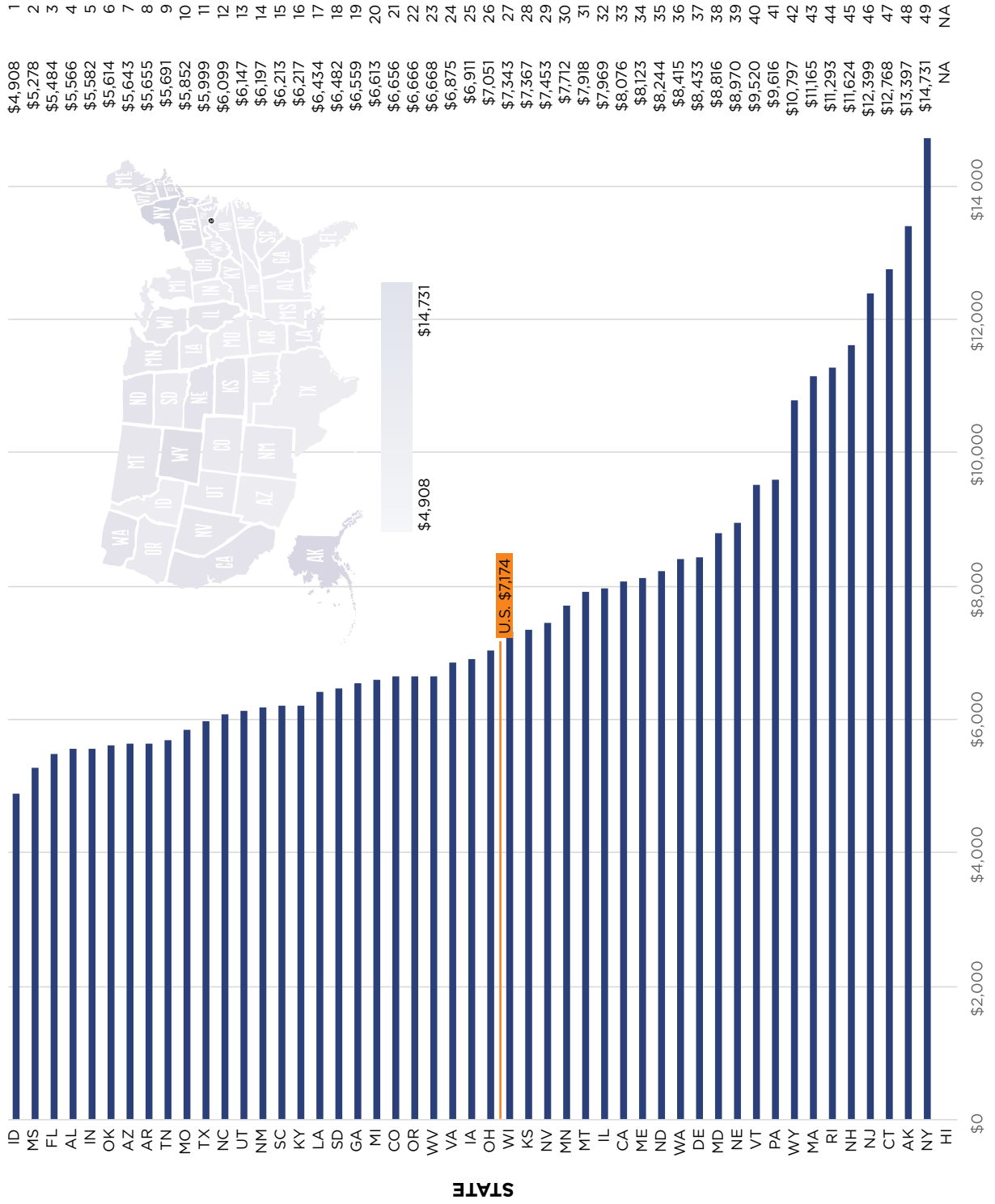
The percentage of rural households with school-aged children who changed residences within the previous 12 months, per U.S. Census figures.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (1-year estimates)

Rural Instructional Expenditures Per Pupil

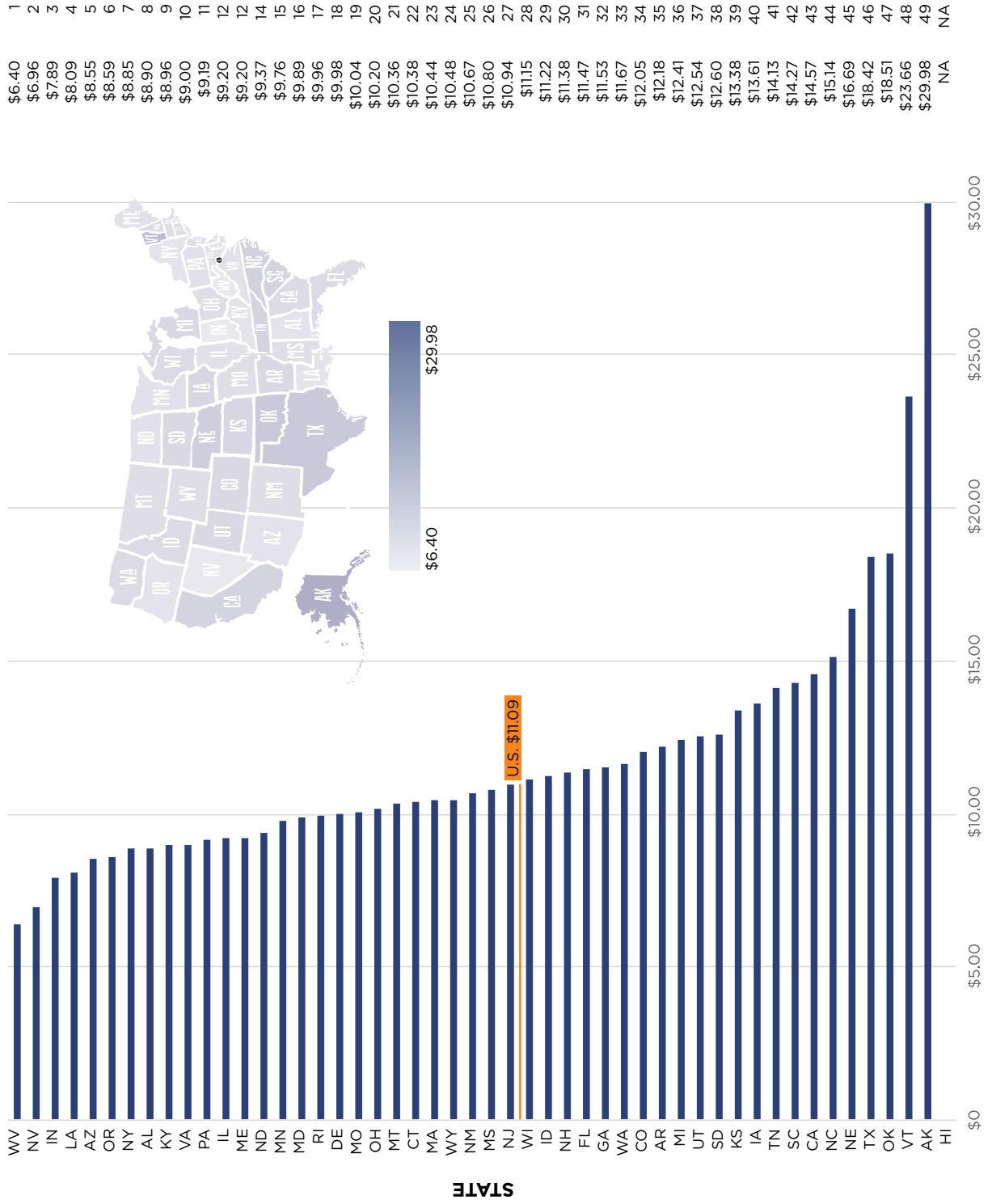
Total current expenditures for instruction in rural school districts, divided by the total number of students enrolled in those school districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2018-2019

Ratio of Instructional to Transportation Expenditures

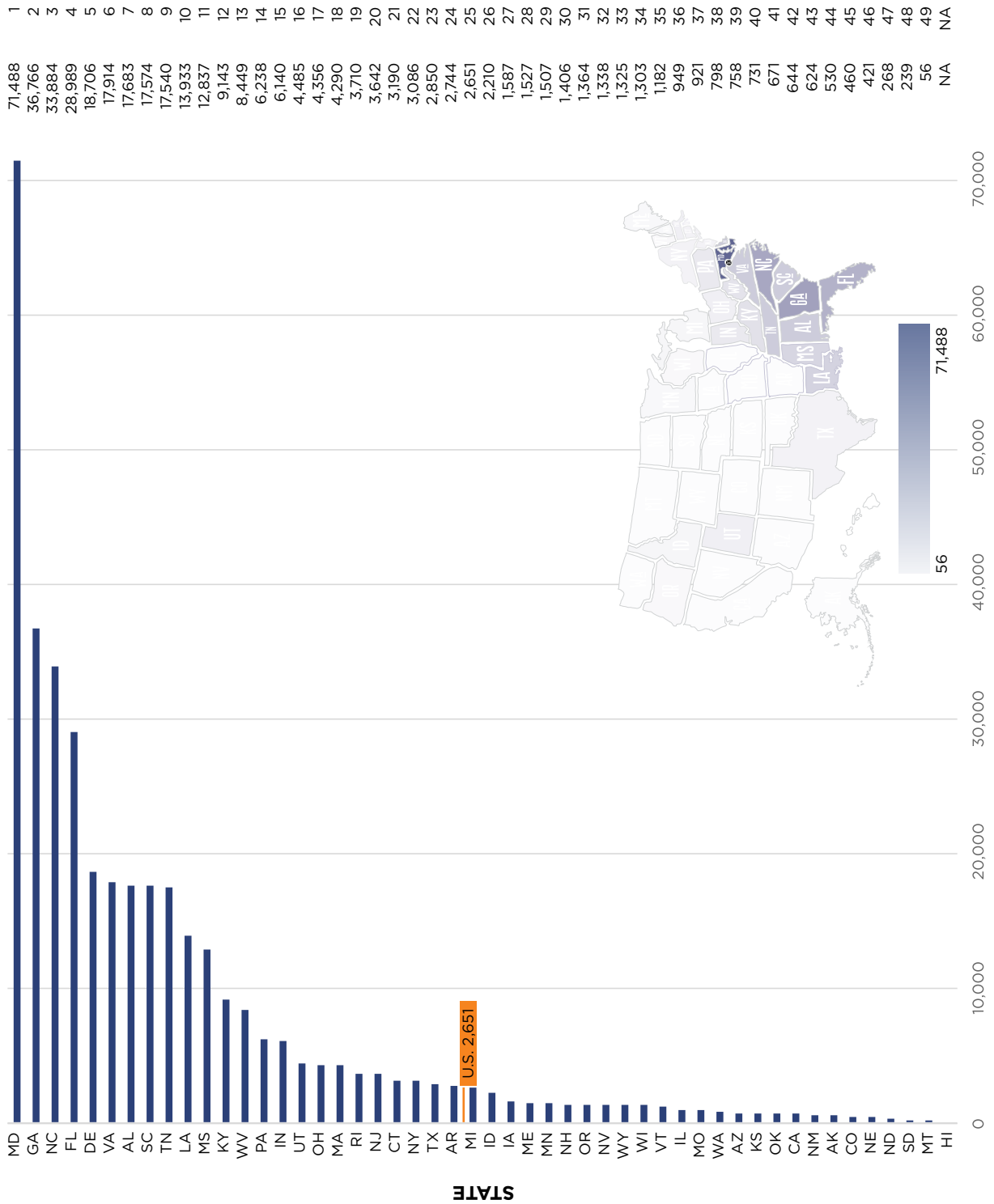
Ratio of total current expenditures for regular education instruction in rural districts to total current expenditures for pupil transportation in rural districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2018-2019

Median Organizational Scale (Divided by 100)

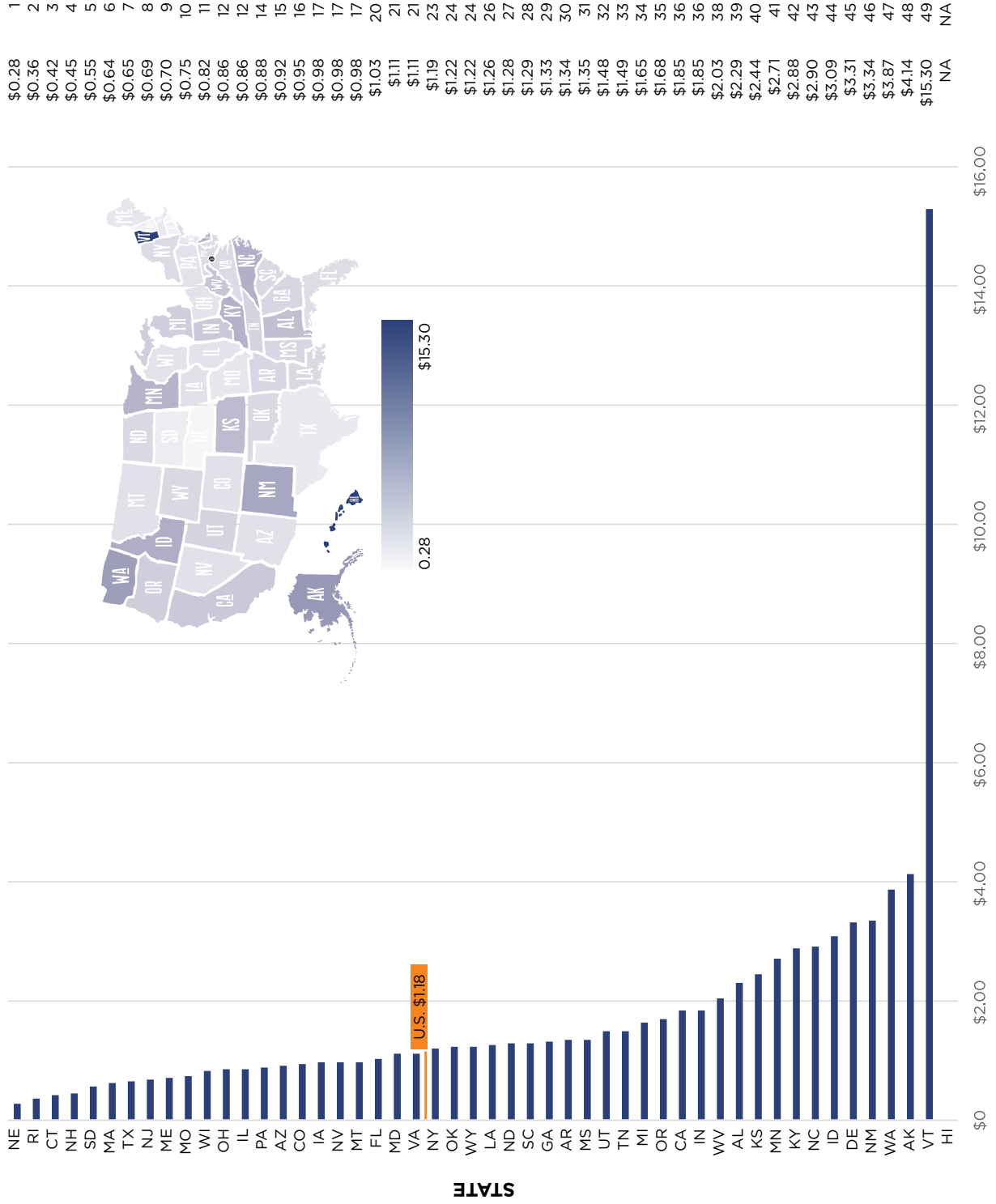
The state median for the organizational scale indicator obtained by multiplying school enrollment by district enrollment.
 (Note: For simplification, the indicators were divided by 100.)



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

State Revenue to Schools Per Local Dollar

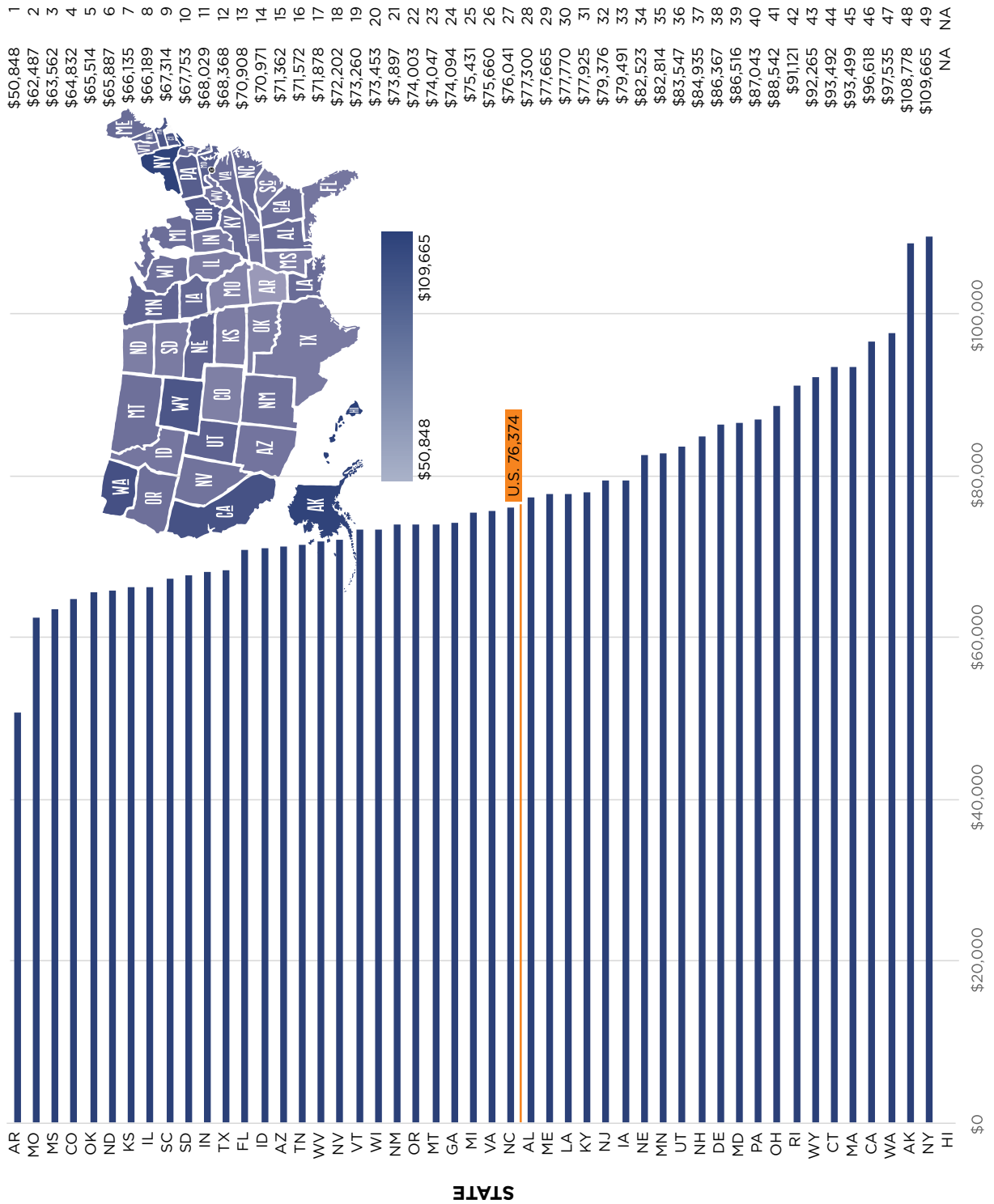
The number of dollars received by rural districts from state funds for each dollar generated by local funds.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2018-2019

Adjusted Salary Expenditures Per Instructional FTE

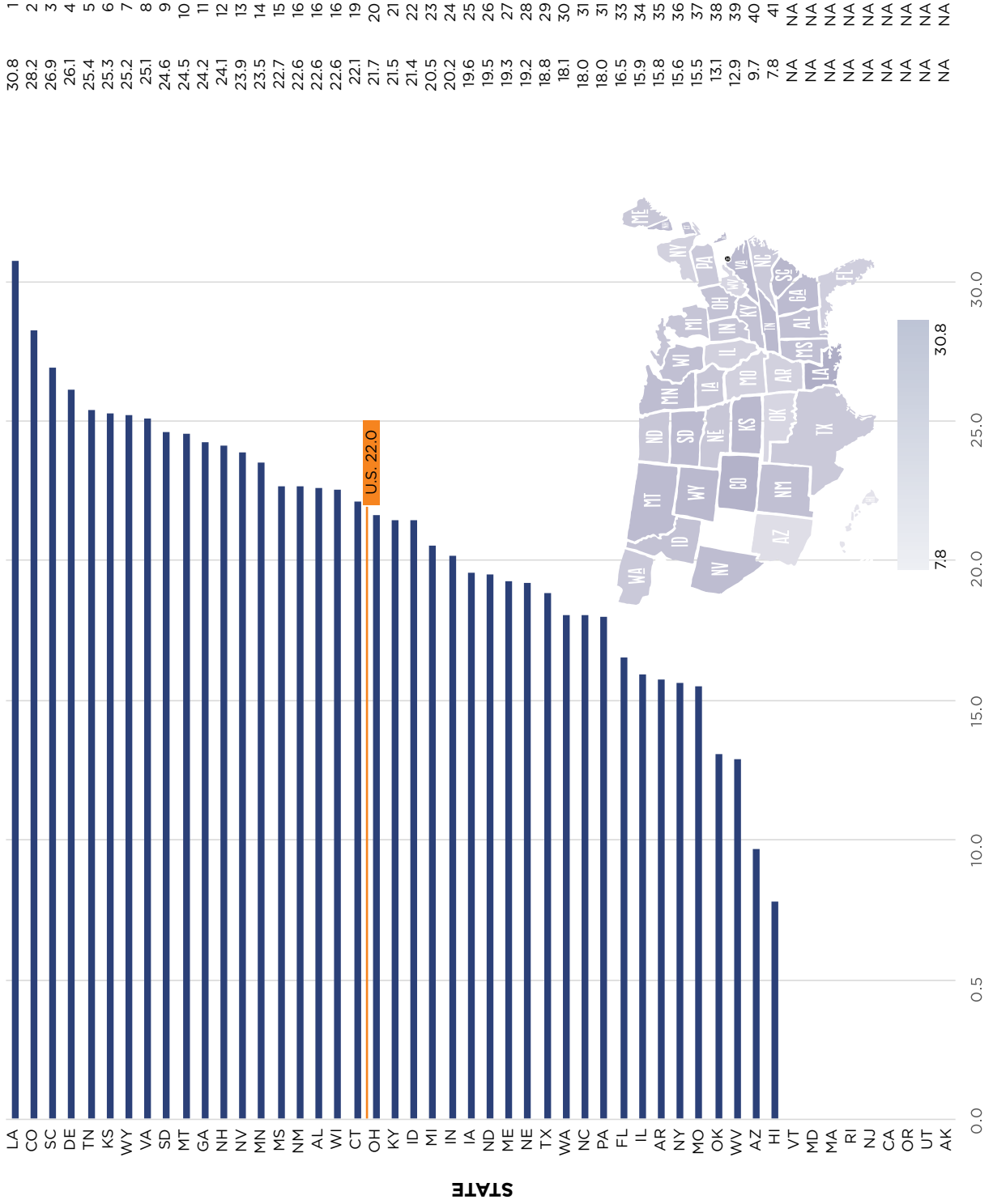
Total current expenditures for instructional salaries, divided by the total number of instructional full-time equivalent staff members, multiplied by the National Center for Education Statistics' respective Comparable Wage Index for Teachers for each rural district.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2018-2019, Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, 2019

Rural NAEAP Poverty Difference in Math (Gr 8)

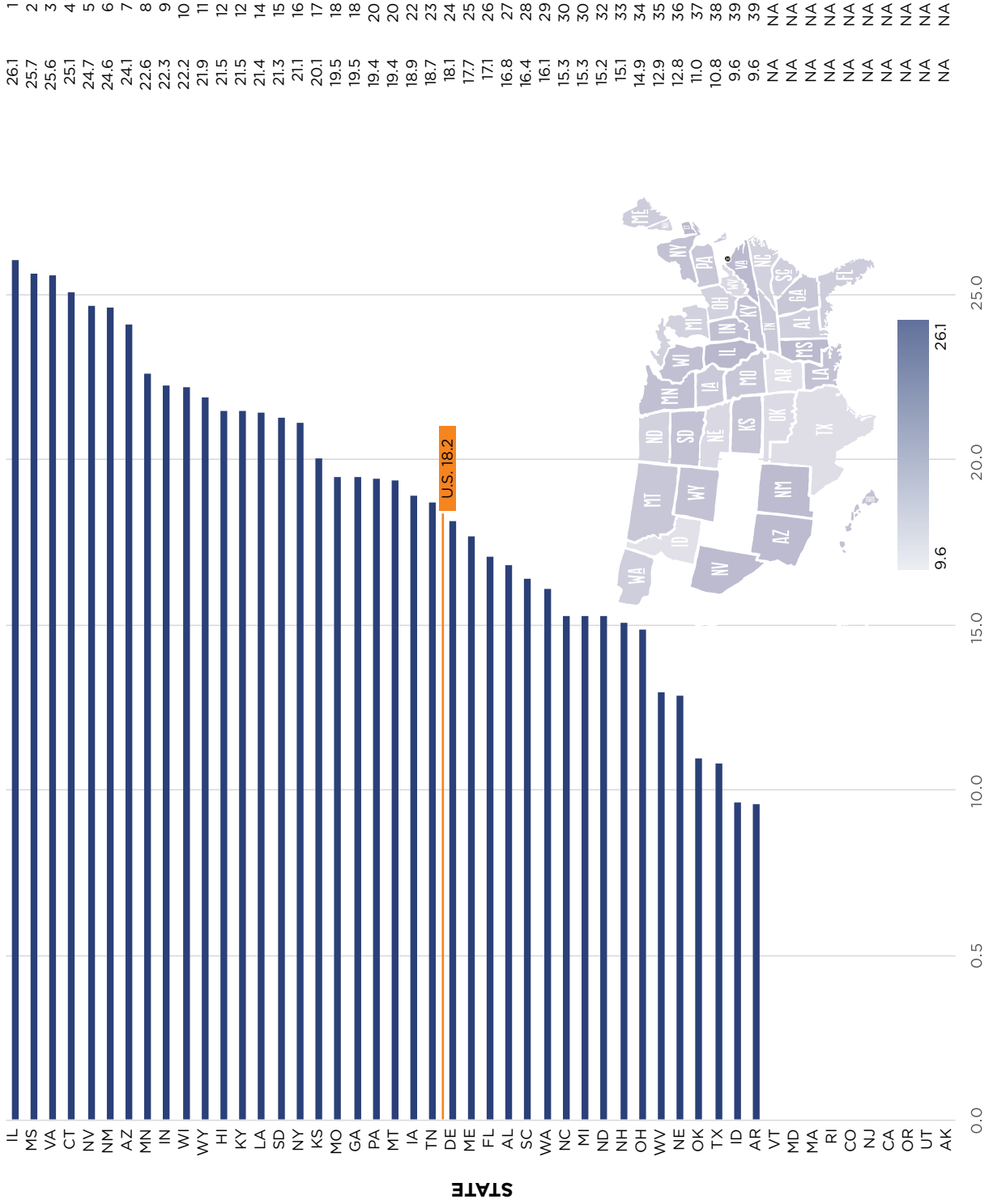
The average score of the rural students ineligible for free or reduced lunch in each state on the 8th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress math test minus the average score of the rural students eligible for free or reduced lunch in each state on the same test.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022

Rural NAEAP Poverty Difference In Reading (Gr 8)

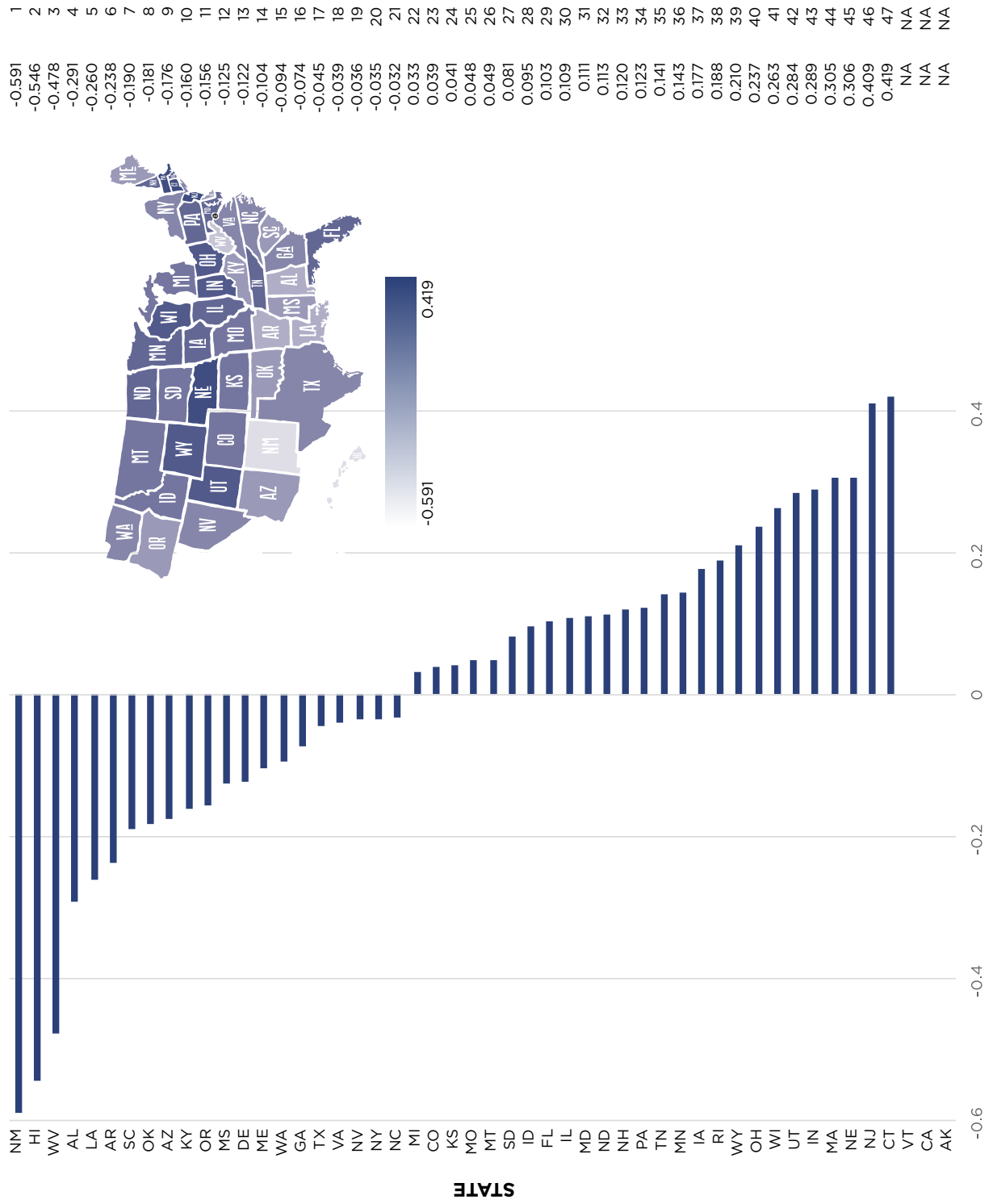
The average score of the rural students ineligible for free or reduced lunch in each state on the 8th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test minus the average score of the rural students eligible for free or reduced lunch in each state on the same test.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022

Rural NAEAP Composite Math (Gr 4 and 8)

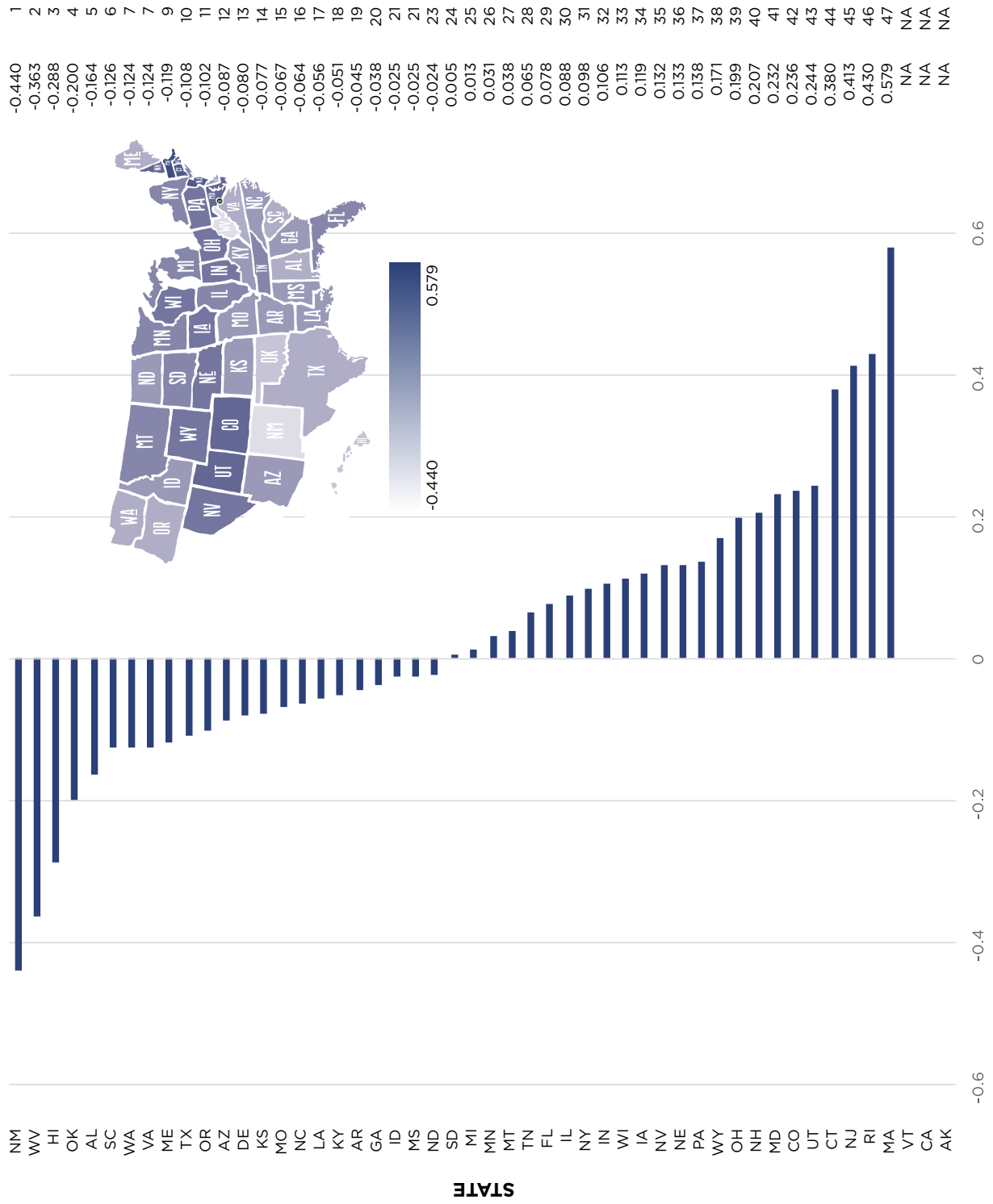
The average of the standardized scores for the rural students in each state on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for 4th and 8th grade math tests. (Note: Standardized z-scores based on national rural mean and standard deviation for each test.)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022

Rural NAEAP Composite Reading (Gr 4 and 8)

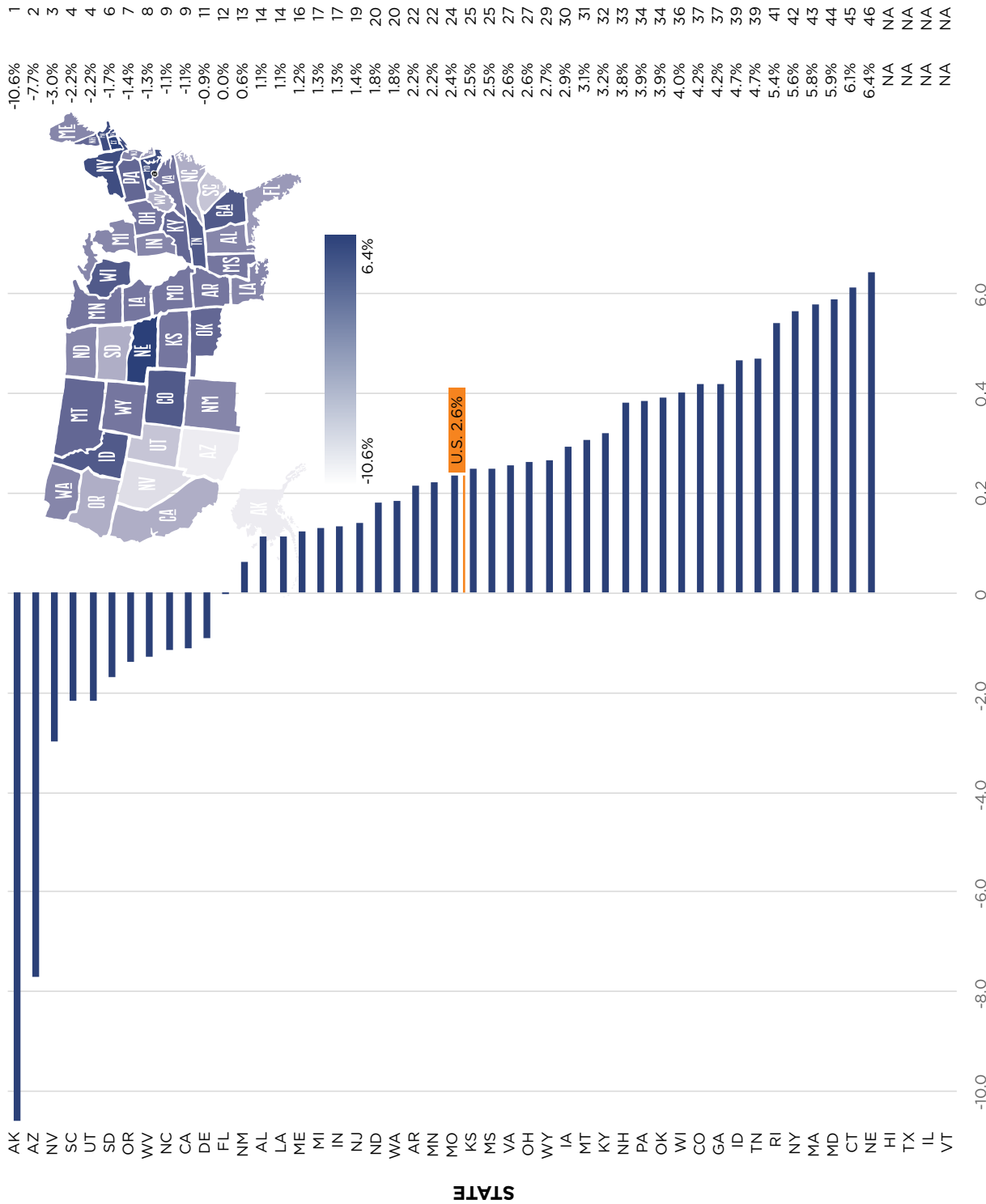
The average of the standardized scores for the rural students in each state on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for 4th and 8th grade reading tests. (Note: Standardized z-scores based on national rural mean and standard deviation for each test.)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2022

Rural Advantage for High School Graduation Rate

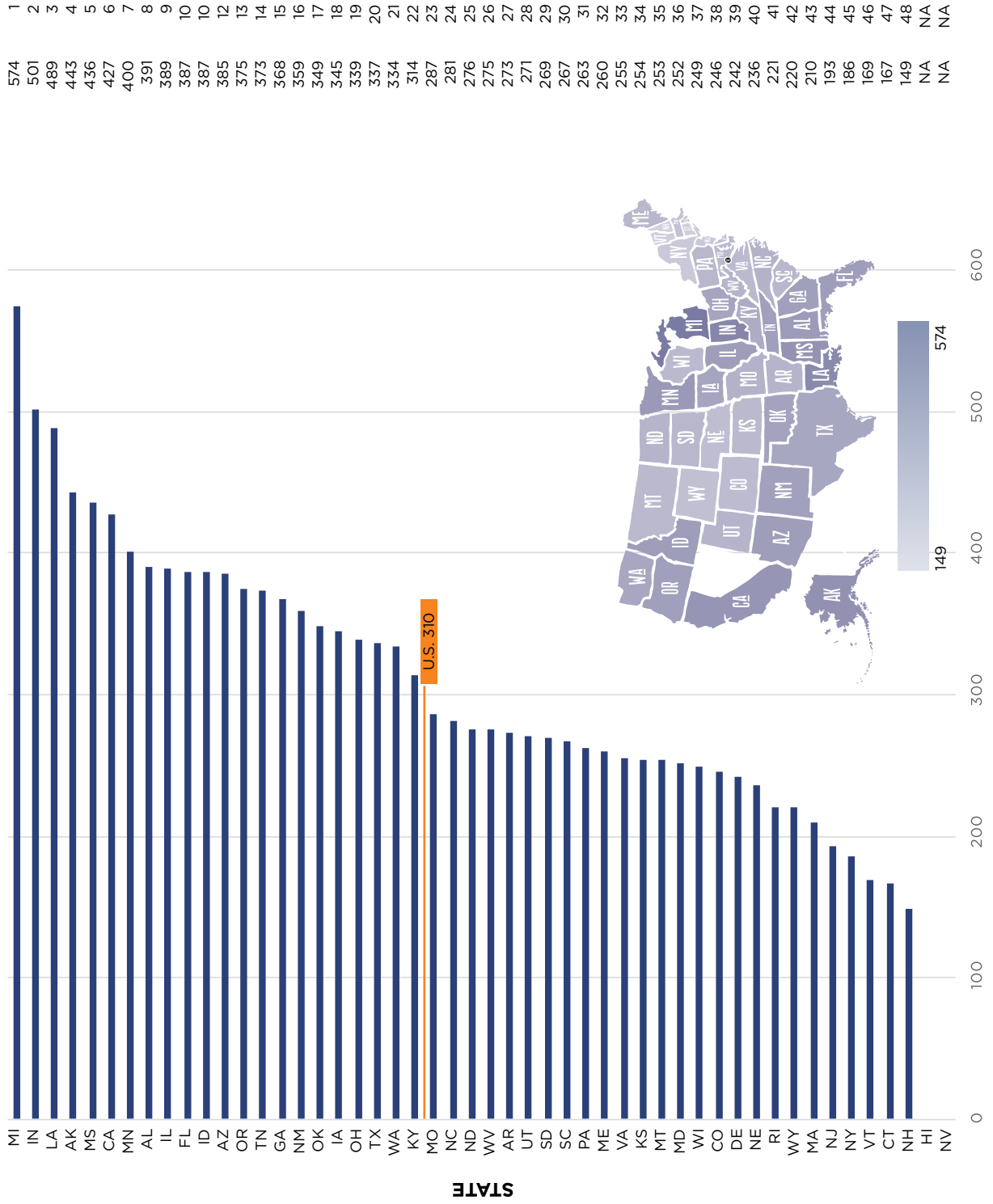
The weighted average high school graduation rate in rural districts minus the weighted average high school graduation rate in nonrural districts. (Note: "Graduation rate" is the number of graduating seniors in rural school districts divided by the total number of students who started with the cohort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



Source: U.S. Department of Education, EDData, Four-Year Adjusted-Cohort Graduation Rates School Year 2019-20

Students Per Psychologist/School Counselor

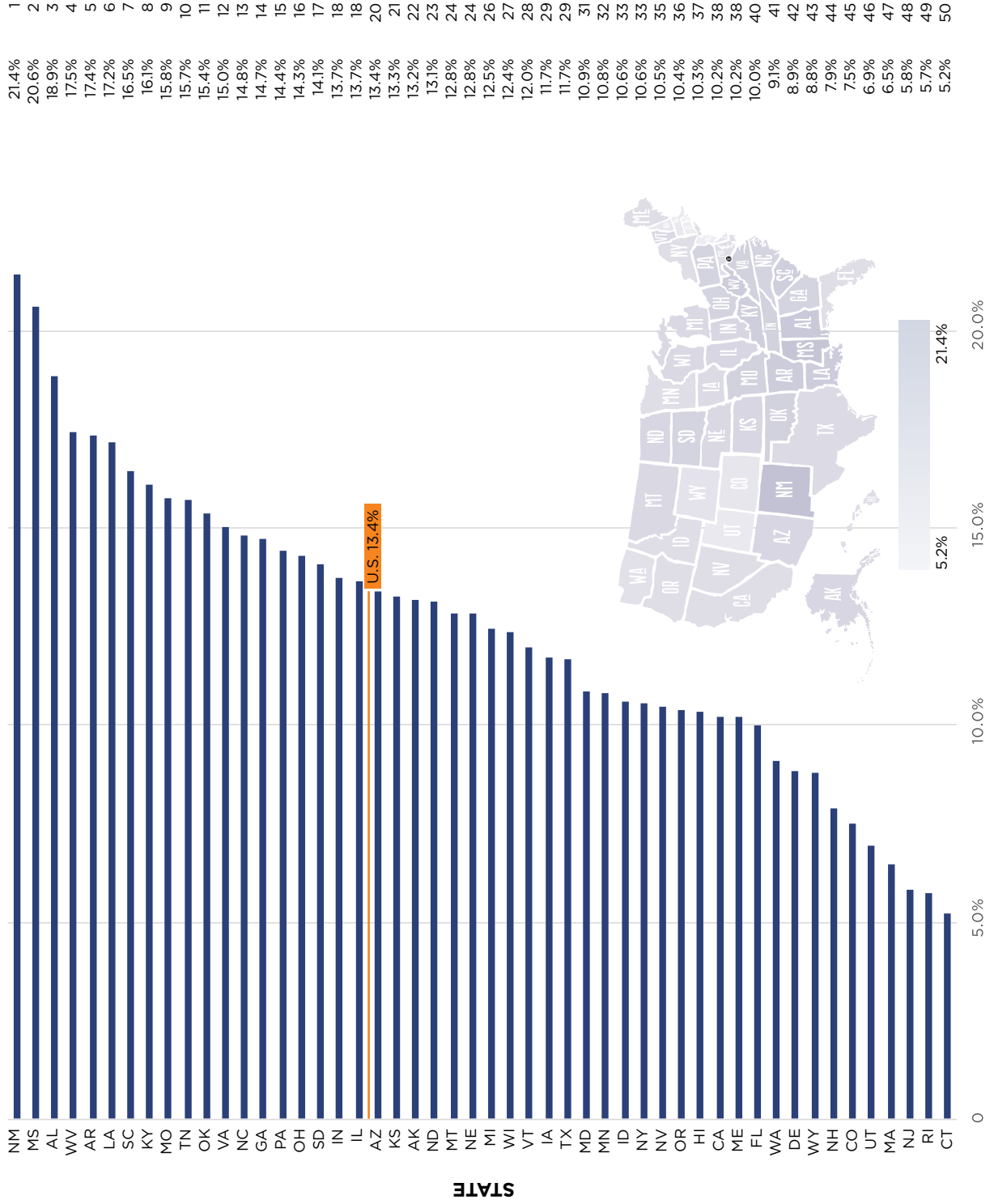
The number of students enrolled in rural districts in the state divided by the number of psychologists and school counselors in those same districts.



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

Percent of Rural Households Without Broadband Access

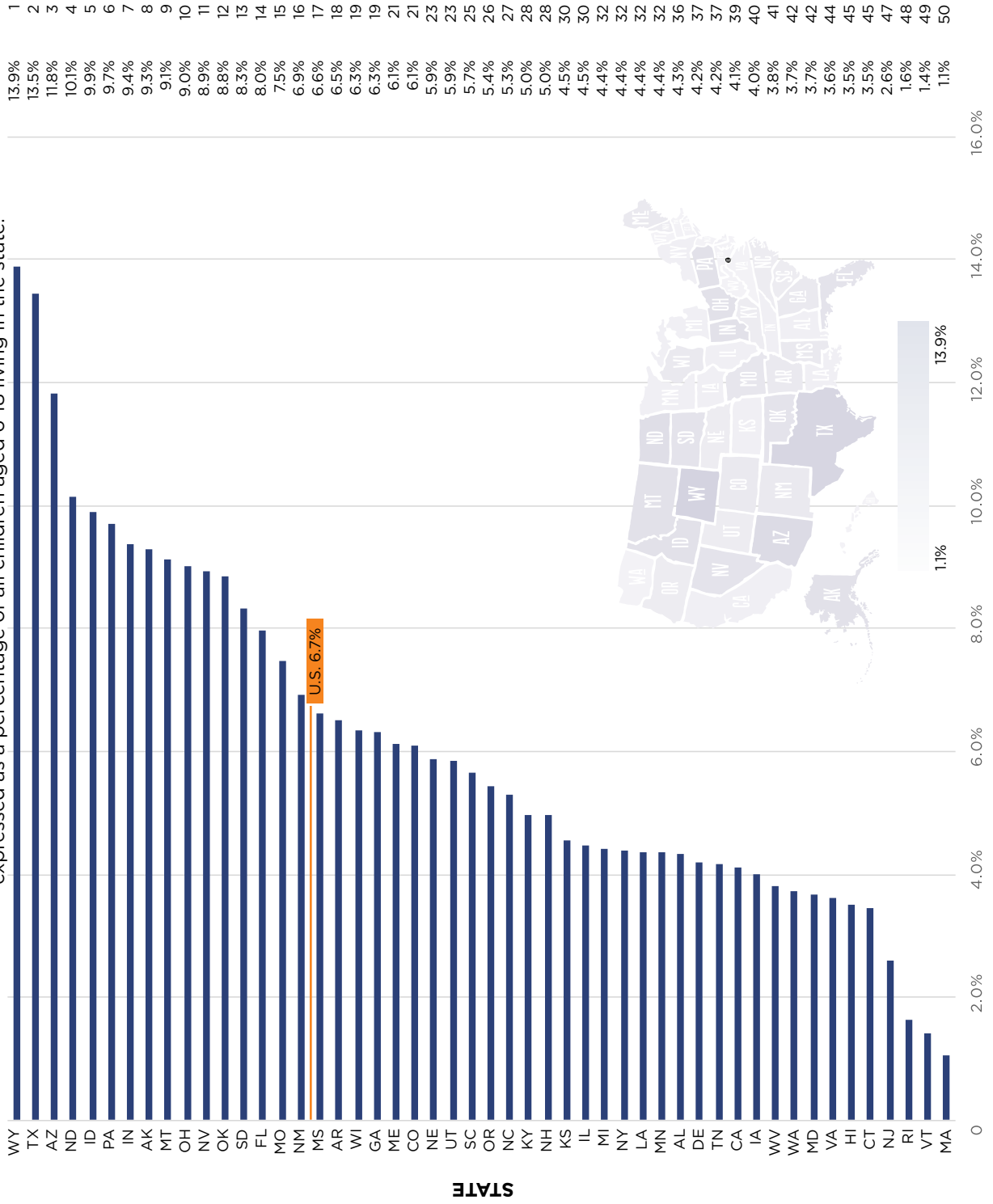
The number of households who report having no access to broadband internet of any type (e.g., cell, DSL, satellite, fiberoptic, cable) in a National Center for Education Statistics-defined rural area, expressed as a percentage of all households in the state.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (1-year estimates)

Percent of Rural School-Aged Children Without Health Insurance Coverage

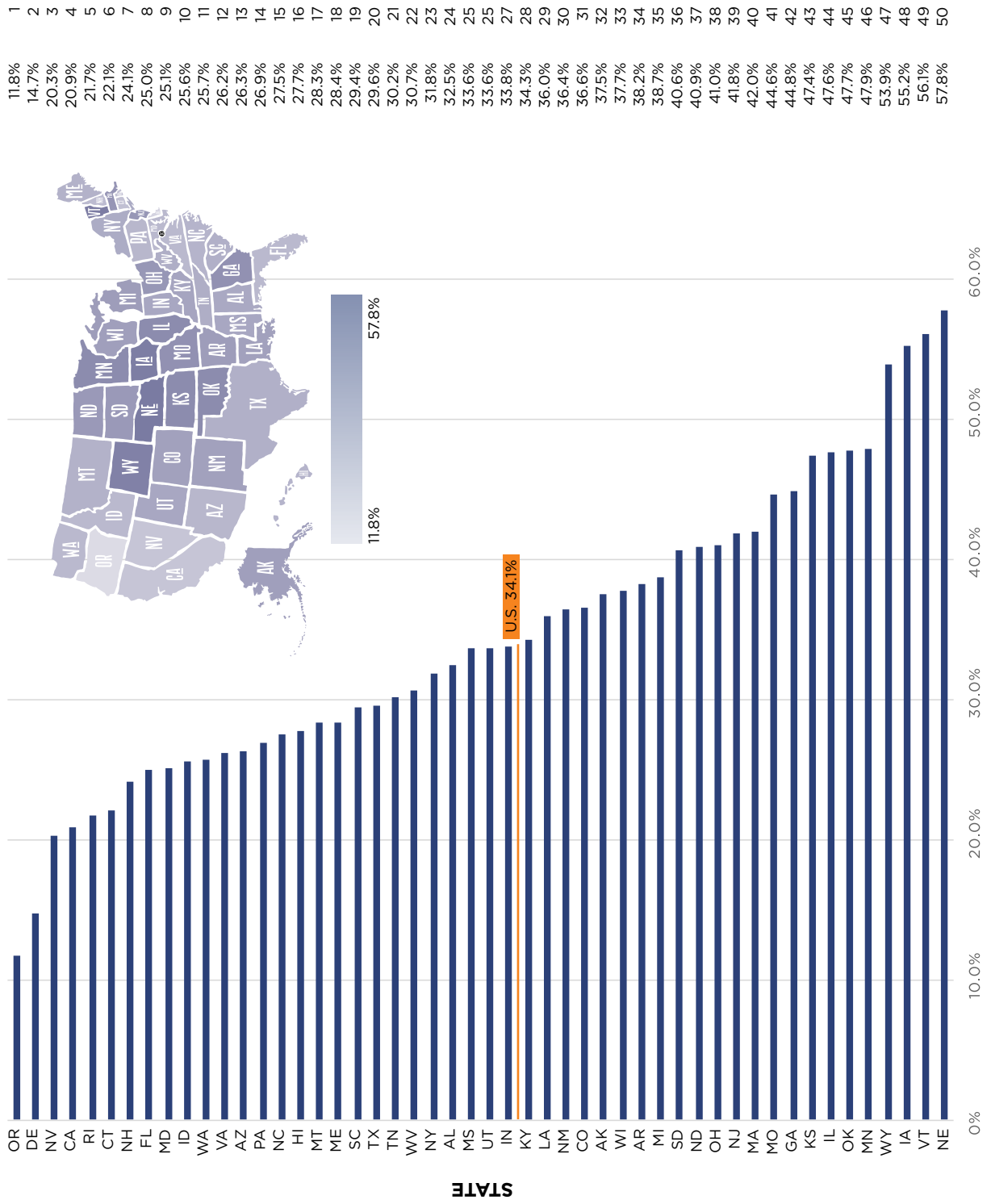
The number of children aged 6-18 who are currently uninsured and living in an area classified as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau, expressed as a percentage of all children aged 6-18 living in the state.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (1-year estimates)

Percent Rural Enrollment In Public Preschool

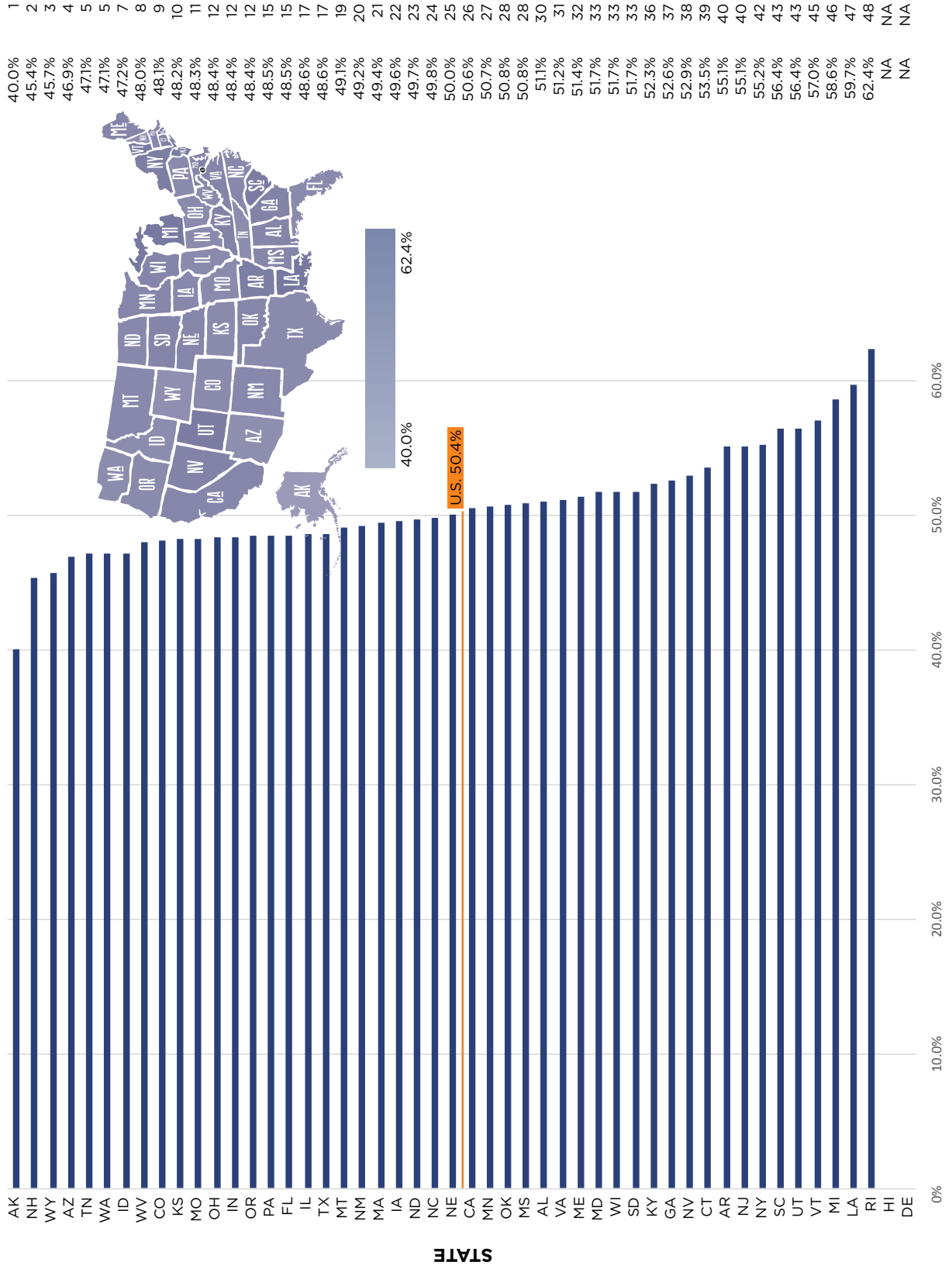
The number of students attending a public preschool in a Census-defined rural area divided by 40% of the total children age 0 to 4 living in those same rural areas in the state.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2021 (1-year estimates)

Percent of Rural Gifted Students Who Are Female

The number of female students enrolled in gifted or talented programs in rural schools, divided by the total number of students enrolled in gifted or talented programs in rural schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2017-18

State-by-State Results



Priority Ranking

2

Leading

Alabama

As the second highest priority state, key factors converge to present persistent challenges for rural education in Alabama. Nearly half of the state's schools are rural, and only three states spend less per student to educate rural students. Almost one in five of Alabama's children experiences poverty and one in ten has changed residences in the past year. Nearly one in five lacks access to broadband at home. Rural school

districts in Alabama are particularly noteworthy for their large size: fewer than two percent are small. Accordingly, Alabama ranks among the top 10 of all states in transportation costs relative to instruction. Students in Alabama schools demonstrate low achievement relative to the median scores of test takers in other states in both reading and math.

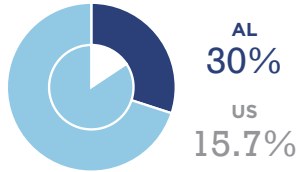
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
17

Percent rural students



	AL	RANK
Percent rural schools	45.5%	16
Percent small rural districts	1.6%	43
Percent rural students	30.0%	13
Number of rural students	223,532	11
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	31.6%	13



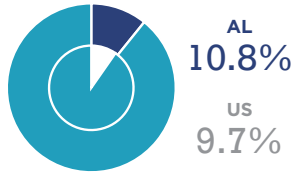
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
12

Percent of rural household mobility



	AL	RANK
Diversity index	35.5%	19
Poverty level in rural school communities	241%	11
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.3%	39
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.0%	10
Percent of rural household mobility	10.8%	10



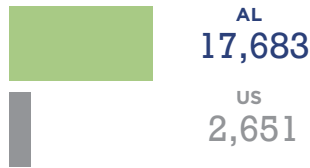
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
6

Median organizational scale



	AL	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,566	4
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$8.90	8
Median organizational scale (x100)	17,683	7
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.29	39
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$77,300	28



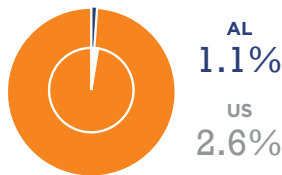
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
7

HS grad rate rural advantage



	AL	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	22.6	16
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	16.8	27
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.291	4
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.164	5
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.1%	14



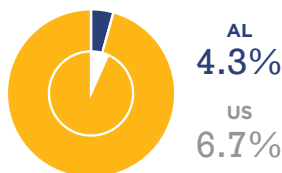
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
14

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	AL	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	391	8
Percent of rural households without broadband access	18.9%	3
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.3%	36
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	32.5%	24
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	51.1%	30



Priority Ranking

25

Major

Alaska

Nearly one in five of Alaska's students attends a rural school, and seven in ten rural districts in Alaska are small. Rural school communities have some of the highest rates of poverty in the United States. Rural districts in Alaska receive around \$4 from the state for every \$1 raised locally. Alaska's rural graduation rate is more than 10 percentage points lower than the non-rural graduation rate—

the largest disparity of any state. While Alaska's teachers receive some of the highest salaries in the United States, student access to school psychologists or school counselors is a critical need in the state with ratios approaching 450 students per professional. The state urgently needs more attention to access to supports for learning and development.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
20

Percent small rural districts



AK
71.4%
US
50.0%

	AK	RANK
Percent rural schools	59.8%	6
Percent small rural districts	71.4%	10
Percent rural students	19.2%	25
Number of rural students	24,900	45
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	28.1%	18



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
26

Poverty level in rural school communities



AK
233%
US
291%

	AK	RANK
Diversity index	26.7%	25
Poverty level in rural school communities	233%	6
Percent of rural students with IEP	12.9%	43
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	14.2%	18
Percent of rural household mobility	8.1%	36



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
49

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



AK
\$29.98
US
\$11.09

	AK	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$13,397	48
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$29.98	49
Median organizational scale (x100)	530	44
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$4.14	48
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$108,778	48



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
N/A

HS grad rate rural advantage



AK
-10.6%
US
2.6%

	AK	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
HS grad rate rural advantage	-10.6%	1



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
4

Students per psychologist/school counselor



AK
433
US
310

	AK	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	443	4
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.2%	22
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.3%	8
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	37.5%	32
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	40.0%	1



Priority Ranking

2

Leading

Arizona

Arizona's rural students are more racially diverse on average compared to other rural students in the United States. The state ranks in the top 10 of all states for its diversity. Rural school communities in Arizona are characterized by high poverty rates, high rates of uninsured children, and high student mobility. More than one in eight students change residences each year and only rural students in Alaska experience a higher disparity in graduation rates compared to their

non-rural peers. The *Educational Policy Context* gauge indicates a crucial need for attention. Arizona has the seventh lowest per pupil spending on instruction in rural schools among all states. Specifically, rural students receive about \$1,200 on average less per student than their peers in other states. Only four states spend proportionally more on transportation relative to instructional costs. Achievement in both math and reading is among the lowest in the United States.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

41

Percent small rural districts



AZ
77.5%
US
50.0%

	AZ	RANK
Percent rural schools	19.0%	39
Percent small rural districts	77.5%	4
Percent rural students	5.7%	46
Number of rural students	50,807	39
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	6.0%	44



GAUGE 2

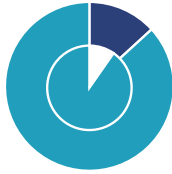
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

1

Percent of rural household mobility



AZ
13.2%
US
9.7%

	AZ	RANK
Diversity index	47.6%	8
Poverty level in rural school communities	231%	5
Percent of rural students with IEP	16.3%	18
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.6%	8
Percent of rural household mobility	13.2%	2



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

5

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



AZ
\$5,643
US
\$7,174

	AZ	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,643	7
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$8.55	5
Median organizational scale (x100)	758	39
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.92	15
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$71,362	15



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

8

HS grad rate rural advantage



AZ
-7.7%
US
2.6%

	AZ	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	9.7	40
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	24.1	7
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.176	9
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.087	12
HS grad rate rural advantage	-7.7%	2



GAUGE 5

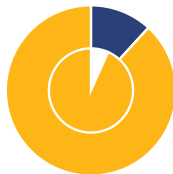
Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

1

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



AZ
11.8%
US
6.7%

	AZ	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	385	12
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.4%	20
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	11.8%	3
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	26.3%	13
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	46.9%	4



Priority Ranking

12

Leading

Arkansas

Almost half of Arkansas' schools are rural. On average, teachers working in those schools are paid the lowest salaries in the United States. Rural Arkansas teachers make about \$26,000 less than the average adjusted salary of rural teachers in other states and over \$31,000 less than non-rural teachers across the United States, who make a little more than \$81,000 per year. NAEP rural math achievement for Arkansas' fourth and eighth graders is particularly low, but reading and math

test scores for rural eighth graders who live in lower income households compared to other rural eighth graders who live in higher-income households is a strength. Arkansas' per pupil spending is very low compared to other states. On average, Arkansas spends about \$1,500 less than other states to educate each rural student. Arkansas ranks among the top 10 states needing urgent attention on both our household level and school level poverty measures.

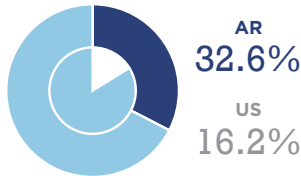
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
12

Percent state education funds to rural districts



	AR	RANK
Percent rural schools	47.9%	14
Percent small rural districts	19.5%	33
Percent rural students	31.7%	11
Number of rural students	147,207	22
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	32.6%	11



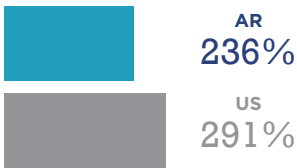
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
10

Poverty level in rural school communities



	AR	RANK
Diversity index	29.3%	22
Poverty level in rural school communities	236%	8
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.4%	28
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	18.0%	7
Percent of rural household mobility	10.2%	18



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
10

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



	AR	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,655	8
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$12.18	35
Median organizational scale (x100)	2,744	24
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.34	30
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$50,848	1



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
26

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



	AR	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	15.8	35
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	9.6	39
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.238	6
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.045	19
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.2%	22



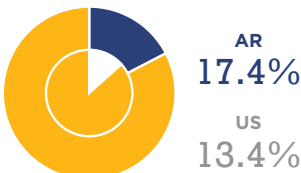
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
26

Percent of rural households without broadband access



	AR	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	273	27
Percent of rural households without broadband access	17.4%	5
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.5%	18
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	38.2%	34
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	55.1%	40



Priority Ranking

34

Significant

California

Over 180,000 children in California attend public school in a rural community, but only about 12% of all schools in the state are rural. State spending on rural education is strong as a proportion of the state's total spending on education, and state funding is almost double local funding. Only three states pay teachers better. Yet, California is among the top 10 priority states where rural high school students are less likely to graduate

than non-rural high school students. Only about one in five children in California is enrolled in public preschool and student access to school counselors or school psychologists is dire at one professional per more than 400 students. In rural California communities, one in eight students experiences poverty, one in ten has changed residences in the past year, and one in ten households has no broadband access.

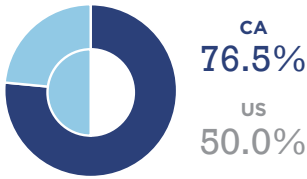
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK 39

Percent small rural districts



	CA	RANK
Percent rural schools	11.7%	48
Percent small rural districts	76.5%	6
Percent rural students	3.4%	48
Number of rural students	183,050	16
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	3.7%	49



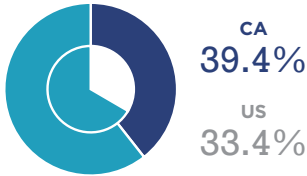
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK 18

Rural diversity index



	CA	RANK
Diversity index	39.4%	15
Poverty level in rural school communities	281%	23
Percent of rural students with IEP	12.3%	45
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.9%	22
Percent of rural household mobility	10.5%	11



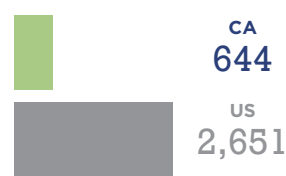
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK 47

Median organizational scale (x 100)



	CA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$8,076	33
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$14.57	43
Median organizational scale (x100)	644	42
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.85	36
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$96,618	46



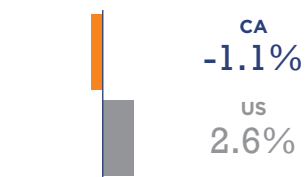
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK N/A

HS grad rate rural advantage



	CA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
HS grad rate rural advantage	-1.1%	9



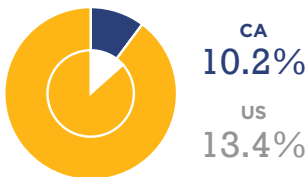
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK 20

Percent of rural households without broadband access



	CA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	427	6
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.2%	38
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.1%	39
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	20.9%	4
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	50.6%	26



Priority Ranking

32

Significant

Colorado

Over 50,000 students attend rural schools in Colorado, most of whom are in small districts. Teacher salaries in the state are very low; only three states pay less. Colorado's rural students are some of the most racially diverse in the United States. The percentage of rural students who experience poverty is low relative to most other states, but more than one in twenty school age children in the state are uninsured. Almost one in eight rural Colorado students changes residences each year, significantly higher than the U.S. norm

of one in ten. Achievement data suggests that the impact of poverty on learning is acute for Colorado's students. Rural math eighth-grade NAEP scores suggest pressing equity concerns. Colorado's students who live in lower income households were significantly outscored by rural eighth-grade students from more affluent households, and only Louisiana has a bigger gap. As a whole, Colorado's rural students tend to fare well on measures of high school graduation.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				38
Percent state education funds to rural districts		CO	RANK	
		24.7%	35	
Percent rural schools		74.5%	7	
Percent small rural districts		6.0%	43	
Percent rural students		51,452	38	
Number of rural students		7.9%	41	
Percent of state education funds to rural districts				

Percent state education funds to rural districts



CO
7.9%
US
16.2%

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				16
Rural diversity index		CO	RANK	
		40.6%	13	
Diversity index		286%	24	
Poverty level in rural school communities		NA	NA	
Percent of rural students with IEP		7.6%	42	
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty		12.4%	5	
Percent of rural household mobility				

Rural diversity index



CO
40.6%
US
33.4%

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				24
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE		CO	RANK	
		\$64,832	21	
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures		\$12.05	34	
Median organizational scale (x100)		460	45	
State revenue to schools per local dollar		\$0.95	16	
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE		\$64,832	4	

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



CO
\$64,832
US
\$76,374

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				31
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)		CO	RANK	
		28.2	2	
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)		NA	NA	
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)		0.039	23	
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)		0.236	42	
HS grad rate rural advantage		4.2%	37	

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



CO
28.2
US
22.0

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				36
Students per psychologist/school counselor		CO	RANK	
		246	38	
Percent of rural households without broadband access		7.5%	45	
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance		6.1%	21	
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool		36.6%	31	
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female		48.1%	9	

Percent of rural households without broadband access



CO
7.5%
US
13.4%

Priority Ranking

45

Notable

Connecticut

Just seven states have a lower percentage of rural schools than Connecticut, and only 14 states educate fewer rural students. Connecticut's 56,000 rural students graduate high school at a much higher rate than their non-rural peers. When test scores for those who experience poverty are combined with those who do not, Connecticut students earn some of the highest scores in the United States on the grade 4 and 8 NAEP reading tests. However, on the eighth-grade test of reading,

rural Connecticut eighth-grade students living in lower income households score significantly lower than rural students from more affluent households above the poverty line. Only three states (Illinois, Mississippi, and Virginia) have a larger gap. A slightly smaller, but still noteworthy gap separates the scores of students from homes with lower incomes from their wealthier counterparts in the state on Connecticut's eighth-grade math tests, despite rural per pupil spending exceeding \$12,000.

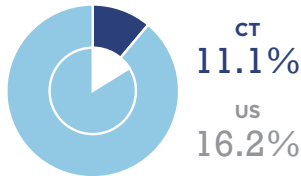
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
40

Percent state education funds to rural districts



	CT	RANK
Percent rural schools	16.2%	43
Percent small rural districts	52.2%	21
Percent rural students	12.0%	35
Number of rural students	56,520	35
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	11.1%	36



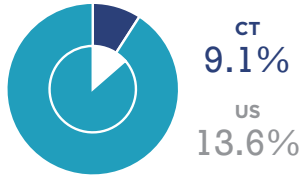
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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RANK
32

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



	CT	RANK
Diversity index	34.9%	20
Poverty level in rural school communities	532%	49
Percent of rural students with IEP	16.7%	14
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.1%	38
Percent of rural household mobility	9.9%	20



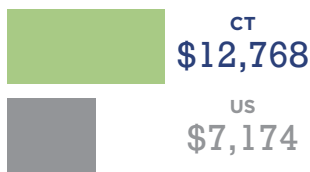
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
34

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



	CT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$12,768	47
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.38	22
Median organizational scale (x100)	3,190	21
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.42	3
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$93,492	44



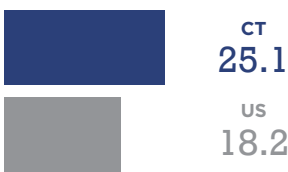
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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RANK
41

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



	CT	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	22.1	19
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	25.1	4
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.419	47
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.380	44
HS grad rate rural advantage	6.1%	45



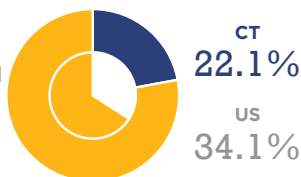
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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RANK
46

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



	CT	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	167	47
Percent of rural households without broadband access	5.2%	50
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.5%	45
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	22.1%	6
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	53.5%	39




Delaware

Although the total number of rural students in Delaware is very small at 17,141, rural schools in Delaware are the most diverse in the United States. Delaware's diversity index is nearly double the average for all states. If you randomly choose a student in a rural Delaware district, then randomly select another student from this school, there is more than a 60% chance the students would be of different races or ethnicities. Since *Why Rural Matters* 2018-2019, Delaware grew even more diverse and saw its child poverty rate increase by

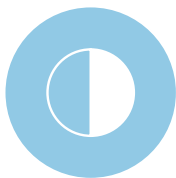
50%. NAEP achievement in Delaware is Urgent on most measures. On the eighth-grade NAEP math test in particular, rural students living in lower income households score much lower than rural students from more affluent households. Only three states (Louisiana, Colorado, and South Carolina) have a larger gap between economic classes on the math test. Delaware has the second lowest rate of public preschool enrollment and rural students are slightly less likely to graduate from high school than their non-rural peers.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK	
				45	
				DE	RANK
Percent rural schools				17.8%	41
Percent small rural districts				0.0%	46
Percent rural students				14.0%	33
Number of rural students				17,141	47
Percent of state education funds to rural districts				12.5%	35


Percent small rural districts



DE
0.0%
US
50.0%

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				4	
				DE	RANK
Diversity index				61.3%	1
Poverty level in rural school communities				26.4%	18
Percent of rural students with IEP				18.5%	4
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty				12.8%	23
Percent of rural household mobility				NA	NA


Rural diversity index



DE
61.3%
US
33.4%

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK	
				38	
				DE	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil				\$8,433	37
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures				\$9.98	18
Median organizational scale (x100)				18,706	5
State revenue to schools per local dollar				\$3.31	45
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE				\$86,367	38


Median organizational scale (x 100)



DE
18,706
US
2,651

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				6	
				DE	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)				26.1	4
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)				18.1	24
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)				-0.122	13
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)				-0.080	13
HS grad rate rural advantage				-0.9%	11


HS grad rate rural advantage



DE
-0.9%
US
2.6%

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				39	
				DE	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor				242	39
Percent of rural households without broadband access				8.9%	42
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance				4.2%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool				14.7%	2
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female				NA	NA

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



DE
14.7%
US
34.1%

Priority Ranking

14

Major

Florida

Florida's 163,000 rural students attend some of the largest schools and school districts in the United States. Only Maryland, Georgia, and North Carolina have larger rural school organizations, and there are no rural school districts in Florida having an enrollment below the U.S. median. These large and very large schools and districts are some of the most diverse in the United States. Florida's rural students are the most mobile in the United States, with more than one in seven

students changing residences each year. Rural per pupil spending is extremely low at under \$5,500 (only two states spend less) and teachers are paid 7% less than the U.S. rural average. Only one in four students attends a public preschool and the rural high school graduation rate is lower than the non-rural rate, unlike most other states. Access to supports for learning and development, as well as student and family diversity measures are of urgent concern in Florida.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				44
Percent small rural districts		FL	RANK	
		0.0%	46	
		us		
		50.0%		
Percent rural schools		FL	RANK	
		14.0%	46	
Percent small rural districts				
		0.0%	46	
Percent rural students				
		5.8%	45	
Number of rural students				
		162,290	19	
Percent of state education funds to rural districts				
		6.6%	43	

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				5
Percent rural household mobility		FL	RANK	
		15.3%	6	
		us		
		9.7%		
Diversity index		FL	RANK	
		48.8%	6	
Poverty level in rural school communities				
		291%	27	
Percent of rural students with IEP				
		16.4%	17	
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty				
		15.3%	16	
Percent of rural household mobility				
		15.3%	1	

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				2
Median organizational scale (x 100)		FL	RANK	
		28,989	3	
		us		
		2,651		
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil		FL	RANK	
		\$5,484	3	
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures				
		\$11.47	31	
Median organizational scale (x100)				
		28,989	4	
State revenue to schools per local dollar				
		\$1.03	20	
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE				
		\$70,908	13	

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				30
HS grad rate rural advantage		FL	RANK	
		0.0%	33	
		us		
		2.6%		
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)		FL	RANK	
		16.5	33	
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)				
		17.1	26	
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)				
		0.103	29	
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)				
		0.078	29	
HS grad rate rural advantage				
		0.0%	12	

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				8
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool		FL	RANK	
		25.0%	10	
		us		
		34.1%		
Students per psychologist/school counselor		FL	RANK	
		387	10	
Percent of rural households without broadband access				
		10.0%	40	
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance				
		8.0%	14	
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool				
		25.0%	8	
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female				
		48.5%	15	

Priority Ranking

16

Major

Georgia

Only Texas and North Carolina educate more rural students than Georgia. Rural Georgia schools and districts are among the largest and most diverse in the United States. Georgia teachers are paid slightly less than the U.S. rural adjusted average and teach in communities where nearly one in six school aged children lives in a household with an income below the federal poverty line. The ratio of state to local school funding in Georgia exceeds

the U.S. rural average. The state provides \$1.33 in funding to rural districts for every \$1.00 sourced from local tax revenue, which is a little more than 10% higher than the rural U.S. average. Georgia's rural students experience nearly double the U.S. rural advantage graduation rate and are enrolled in public preschool at rates more than 10 percentage points higher than the U.S. rural average.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

19

Number of rural students



	GA	RANK
Percent rural schools	33.0%	28
Percent small rural districts	6.6%	36
Percent rural students	27.6%	16
Number of rural students	468,932	3
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	30.3%	16



GAUGE 2

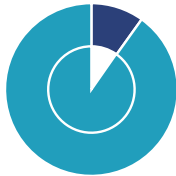
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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RANK

13

Percent rural household mobility



	GA	RANK
Diversity index	48.5%	7
Poverty level in rural school communities	259%	17
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.6%	36
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.9%	13
Percent of rural household mobility	9.9%	20



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

15

Median organizational scale (x 100)



	GA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,559	19
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.53	32
Median organizational scale (x100)	36,766	2
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.33	29
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$74,094	24



GAUGE 4

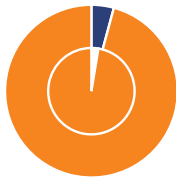
Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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RANK

18

HS grad rate rural advantage



	GA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	24.2	11
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	19.5	18
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.074	16
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.038	20
HS grad rate rural advantage	4.2%	37



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

28

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



	GA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	368	15
Percent of rural households without broadband access	14.7%	14
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.3%	19
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	44.8%	42
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	52.6%	37



Hawaii

Schools in Hawaii belong to one non-rural school district and so there is no district-level data. However, more than one in seven of Hawaii's schools are rural. Children attending Hawaii's rural schools experience some of the highest rates of poverty in the United States. Only Kentucky and New Mexico have a greater percent of their rural children between ages 5 and 17 living in households with incomes

below the poverty line. Rural NAEP scores are extremely low for math and reading in grades four and eight. Only students in New Mexico and West Virginia underperform Hawaii's rural children on these tests. Educational outcomes are urgent for the state's rural children. Hawaii is excluded from three of the five gauge rankings and is thus not part of the overall state ranking.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

Percent rural schools



HI
15.3%
us
29.3%

	NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL		
Percent rural schools					HI	RANK
Percent small rural districts					15.3%	45
Percent rural students					NA	NA
Number of rural students					NA	NA
Percent of state education funds to rural districts					NA	NA

RANK
N/A

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



HI
22.2%
us
13.6%

	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT		
Diversity index					HI	RANK
Poverty level in rural school communities					NA	NA
Percent of rural students with IEP					NA	NA
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty					22.2%	3
Percent of rural household mobility					NA	NA

RANK
N/A

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

N/A

	NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL		
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil					HI	RANK
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures					NA	NA
Median organizational scale (x100)					NA	NA
State revenue to schools per local dollar					NA	NA
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE					NA	NA

RANK
N/A

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)



HI
-0.546
us
0.0

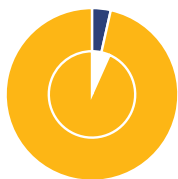
	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT		
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)					HI	RANK
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)					7.8	41
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)					21.5	12
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)					-0.546	2
HS grad rate rural advantage					-0.288	3
					NA	NA

RANK
9

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



HI
3.5%
us
6.7%

	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT		
Students per psychologist/school counselor					HI	RANK
Percent of rural households without broadband access					NA	NA
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance					10.3%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool					3.5%	45
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female					27.7%	16
					NA	NA

RANK
43

Priority Ranking

23

Major

Idaho

Compared to spending on non-rural districts, Idaho allots disproportionately less funding to rural districts as a share of all state education revenue. At less than \$5,000 per rural student, the state's rural instructional expenditures for its 75,000 rural students are the lowest in the United States. Idaho's greatest challenge comes in the area of Access to Supports for

Learning and Development. With the exception of reasonable rates of broadband access, four of five the indicators are in the top 10 for priority. Idaho has one of the smallest differences between rural students in lower income households and their wealthier rural peers on eighth-grade reading NAEP scores.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
21

Percent rural schools



ID
40.5%
US
29.3%

	ID	RANK
Percent rural schools	40.5%	20
Percent small rural districts	61.0%	19
Percent rural students	26.1%	18
Number of rural students	74,884	31
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	25.8%	19



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
21

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



ID
9.6%
US
13.6%

	ID	RANK
Diversity index	30.9%	21
Poverty level in rural school communities	239%	10
Percent of rural students with IEP	11.2%	48
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.6%	36
Percent of rural household mobility	12.2%	6



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
19

State revenue to schools per local dollar



ID
\$3.09
US
\$1.18

	ID	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$4,908	1
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.22	29
Median organizational scale (x100)	2,210	26
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$3.09	44
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$70,971	14



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
38

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



ID
9.6
US
18.2

	ID	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	21.4	22
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	9.6	39
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.095	28
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.025	21
HS grad rate rural advantage	4.7%	39



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
2

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



ID
47.2%
US
50.4%

	ID	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	387	10
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.6%	33
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.9%	5
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	25.6%	10
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	47.2%	7



Priority Ranking

29

Significant

Illinois

Slightly more than one in five schools in Illinois are rural. Over 160,000 rural students attend rural schools in the state, but rural students represent only about 9% of all students in the state. Rural Illinois teachers are paid, on average, \$10,000 less than rural teachers in other states and about \$16,000 less than their non-rural peers. On the eighth-grade NAEP test of reading, rural Illinois students living in lower income households have the lowest scores compared

to their peers from wealthier households. The poverty gap in eighth-grade reading is 43% greater than the rural United States average, suggesting significant inequities in the extent to which eighth-grade children from lower income households are learning. Rural districts in Illinois receive only 86 cents of state funding for every dollar of local revenue they raise, ranking 12th in priority for inequitable school funding.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
34

Percent small rural districts



IL
62.3%
US
50.0%

	IL	RANK
Percent rural schools	20.9%	37
Percent small rural districts	62.3%	18
Percent rural students	8.6%	38
Number of rural students	160,902	20
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	8.5%	38



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
39

Rural diversity index



IL
21.1%
US
33.4%

	IL	RANK
Diversity index	21.1%	36
Poverty level in rural school communities	318%	37
Percent of rural students with IEP	16.5%	15
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.6%	27
Percent of rural household mobility	7.3%	42



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
13

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



IL
\$66,189
US
\$76,374

	IL	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,969	32
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.20	12
Median organizational scale (x100)	949	36
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.86	12
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$66,189	8



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
24

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



IL
26.1
US
18.2

	IL	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	15.9	34
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	26.1	1
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.109	30
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.088	30
HS grad rate rural advantage	NA	NA



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
23

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



IL
47.6%
US
34.1%

	IL	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	389	9
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.7%	18
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.5%	30
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	47.6%	44
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.6%	17



Priority Ranking

11

Leading

Indiana

Indiana falls just outside of the top 10 in terms of priority. Almost one in four students in the state attends rural schools, and the state has one of the largest populations of rural students in absolute numbers. These students generally attend large schools and districts, with only one in 25 of the districts classified as small. At less than \$6,000 per rural student, instructional spending is very low. Only four states spend less to educate their rural learners, and Indiana districts' spending on

transportation is high relative to instructional costs, ranking third among states. The *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge rank is Urgent, particularly the ratio of school counselors and school psychologists to the number of students served in rural schools. On average, there are 500 rural Indiana students to just one mental health professional—only rural Michigan students have less access.

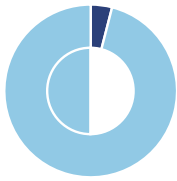
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
22

Percent small rural districts



IN
4.0%
US
50.0%

	IN	RANK
Percent rural schools	38.2%	22
Percent small rural districts	4.0%	38
Percent rural students	24.2%	19
Number of rural students	238,590	8
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	23.2%	23



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
28

Rural diversity index



IN
19.7%
US
33.4%

	IN	RANK
Diversity index	19.7%	39
Poverty level in rural school communities	289%	26
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.5%	11
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	10.7%	33
Percent of rural household mobility	9.6%	24



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
1

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



IN
\$5,582
US
\$7,174

	IN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,582	5
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$7.89	3
Median organizational scale (x100)	6,140	15
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.85	36
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$68,029	11



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
29

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



IN
22.3
US
18.2

	IN	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	20.2	24
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	22.3	9
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.289	43
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.106	32
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.3%	17



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
3

Students per psychologist/school counselor



IN
501
US
310

	IN	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	501	2
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.7%	18
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.4%	7
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.8%	27
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.4%	12



Priority Ranking

40

Notable

Iowa

Attention to Iowa's rural schools and communities is notably important. Slightly more than half of Iowa's schools are rural and nearly one in three of the state's public PK-12 learners lives in a rural community. The percent of Iowa children attending rural districts is more than double the U.S. average. The schools are some of the most racially homogeneous in the United States, and school community and child poverty levels are relatively

low in comparison to other states. The ratio of state support to local funding is nearly one-to-one, and per pupil funding for rural education ranks exactly in the middle of all states, though slightly below average. The state has one of the highest rural enrollments in public preschool but ranks well below the U.S. median for students' access to school psychologists and counselors.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

10

Percent rural students



IA
32.8%
US
15.7%

	IA	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.2%	11
Percent small rural districts	37.7%	28
Percent rural students	32.8%	9
Number of rural students	167,689	17
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	30.4%	15



GAUGE 2

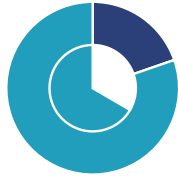
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

48

Rural diversity index



IA
19.4%
US
33.4%

	IA	RANK
Diversity index	19.4%	41
Poverty level in rural school communities	319%	38
Percent of rural students with IEP	12.7%	44
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	8.0%	41
Percent of rural household mobility	8.6%	29



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

37

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



IA
\$6,911
US
\$7,174

	IA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,911	25
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$13.61	40
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,587	27
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.98	17
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$79,491	33



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

36

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



IA
18.9
US
18.2

	IA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	19.6	25
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	18.9	22
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.177	37
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.119	34
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.9%	30



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

41

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



IA
55.2%
US
34.1%

	IA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	345	18
Percent of rural households without broadband access	11.7%	29
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.0%	40
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	55.2%	48
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.6%	22



Priority Ranking

26

Significant

Kansas

At 46%, the percent of schools in Kansas that are rural is significantly above the U.S. average of about 30%, but the absolute number of rural public school students in the state ranks near the median. Kansas teachers make about \$10,000 less than their peers teaching in rural schools in other states, and educational outcomes for rural children are of urgent concern. On each

educational outcome indicator, Kansas scores in the most concerning half of all states. At rank six in importance, the rural poverty difference in eighth-grade math indicates a clear need for attention to the equitable education of the state's rural eighth graders. Rural girls are underrepresented in gifted education programs across the state.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
15

Percent rural schools



KS
46.3%
US
29.3%

	KS	RANK
Percent rural schools	46.3%	15
Percent small rural districts	68.2%	13
Percent rural students	23.7%	20
Number of rural students	114,746	24
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	24.3%	21



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
21

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



KS
7.4%
US
13.6%

	KS	RANK
Diversity index	29.0%	23
Poverty level in rural school communities	294%	28
Percent of rural students with IEP	16.5%	15
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	7.4%	44
Percent of rural household mobility	10.5%	11



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
43

Median organizational scale (x 100)



KS
731
US
2,651

	KS	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,367	28
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$13.38	39
Median organizational scale (x100)	731	40
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.44	40
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$66,135	7



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
13

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



KS
25.3
US
22.0

	KS	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	25.3	6
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	20.1	17
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.041	24
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.077	14
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.5%	25



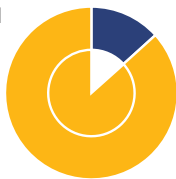
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
33

Percent of rural households without broadband access



KS
13.3%
US
13.4%

	KS	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	254	34
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.3%	21
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.5%	30
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	47.4%	43
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.2%	10



Priority Ranking

6

Leading

Kentucky

A strength of rural education in Kentucky is its relative success at equitably identifying girls for gifted education. This is not the case in some states, where rural girls make up as few as 40% of the students on gifted education rosters. Another bright spot is Kentucky's success in graduating rural students from high school relative to non-rural students. However, given that Kentucky ranks Crucial and Urgent on two

of five gauges, it's unsurprising that Kentucky ranks 6 overall in rural priority. The state has nearly double the U.S. average number of rural students, but these students receive just 35% of the state's education funding. Community poverty levels are dire and more than one in five students live in homes where the household income is below the federal poverty line of \$30,000 for a family of four.

GAUGE 1

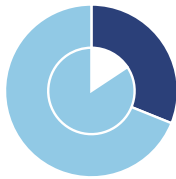
Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

12

Percent rural students



KY
31.1%
US
15.7%

	KY	RANK
Percent rural schools	42.0%	19
Percent small rural districts	5.8%	37
Percent rural students	31.1%	12
Number of rural students	203,149	13
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	35.1%	10



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

6

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



KY
22.6%
US
13.6%

	KY	RANK
Diversity index	18.2%	42
Poverty level in rural school communities	217%	2
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.8%	9
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	22.6%	2
Percent of rural household mobility	10.1%	19



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

17

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



KY
\$8.96
US
\$11.09

	KY	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,217	16
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$8.96	9
Median organizational scale (x100)	9,143	12
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.88	42
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$77,925	31



GAUGE 4

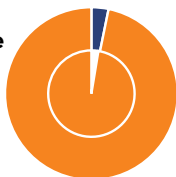
Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

16

HS grad rate rural advantage



KY
3.2%
US
2.6%

	KY	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	21.5	21
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	21.5	12
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.160	10
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.051	18
HS grad rate rural advantage	3.2%	32



GAUGE 5

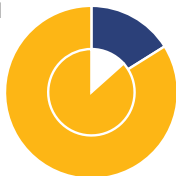
Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

25

Percent of rural households without broadband access



KY
16.1%
US
13.4%

	KY	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	314	22
Percent of rural households without broadband access	16.1%	8
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.0%	28
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	34.3%	28
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	52.3%	36



Priority Ranking

6

Leading

Louisiana

Louisiana's school population is characterized by high diversity and especially high poverty. Of all states with available data, Louisiana has the most concerning performance in math education for eighth-grade students eligible for free or reduced meals. Transportation costs are an outsized expense in rural districts in the

state, with only three states having less favorable ratios than Louisiana. One of the state's most promising indicators is the high adjusted rural teacher salaries, but at almost 500 children to each mental health professional, rural children lack equitable access to school counselors and school psychologists.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				35
		LA	RANK	
Percent rural schools		34.3%	26	
Percent small rural districts		3.7%	39	
Percent rural students		13.8%	34	
Number of rural students		83,991	26	
Percent of state education funds to rural districts		15.1%	34	

Percent rural schools



LA
34.3%
US
29.3%

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				8
		LA	RANK	
Diversity index		39.9%	14	
Poverty level in rural school communities		219%	4	
Percent of rural students with IEP		13.3%	39	
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty		21.7%	4	
Percent of rural household mobility		10.4%	14	

Poverty level in rural school communities



LA
219%
US
291%

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				7
		LA	RANK	
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil		\$6,434	17	
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures		\$8.09	4	
Median organizational scale (x100)		13,933	10	
State revenue to schools per local dollar		\$1.26	26	
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE		\$77,770	30	

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



LA
\$6,434
US
\$7,174

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				4
		LA	RANK	
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)		30.8	1	
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)		21.4	14	
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)		-0.260	5	
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)		-0.056	17	
HS grad rate rural advantage		1.1%	14	

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



LA
30.8
US
22.0

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				22
		LA	RANK	
Students per psychologist/school counselor		489	3	
Percent of rural households without broadband access		17.2%	6	
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance		4.4%	32	
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool		36.0%	29	
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female		59.7%	47	

Students per psychologist/school counselor



LA
489
US
310

Priority Ranking

21

Major

Maine

Maine ranks first in the *Importance* gauge and 21st overall. Nearly one in two students in Maine lives in a rural community. Only three states have proportionally more rural schools: South Dakota, Montana, and Vermont. Although 68% of Maine's schools are rural, less than 50% of the state's education funds goes to rural districts, making Maine a top priority for equitable state funding for

rural schools. Likewise, the ratio of state funding to local funding for rural schools skews far to local sources of funds, contributing to the issue of unequal school funding. Maine ranks just outside the top 10 states where transportation costs are high relative to spending on instruction. Poverty-based performance gaps in grade 8 math and reading fall around the middle of all 50 states.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

1

Percent rural students



ME
48.1%
US
15.7%

	ME	RANK
Percent rural schools	67.5%	4
Percent small rural districts	71.5%	8
Percent rural students	48.1%	3
Number of rural students	81,911	28
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	49.4%	3



GAUGE 2

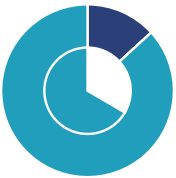
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

31

Rural diversity index



ME
13.2%
US
33.4%

	ME	RANK
Diversity index	13.2%	48
Poverty level in rural school communities	299%	31
Percent of rural students with IEP	18.3%	6
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.2%	20
Percent of rural household mobility	8.4%	31



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

18

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



ME
\$9.20
US
\$11.09

	ME	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$8,123	34
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.20	12
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,527	28
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.70	9
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$77,665	29



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

15

Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)



ME
-0.119
US
0.0

	ME	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	19.3	27
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	17.7	25
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.104	14
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.119	9
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.2%	16



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

35

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



ME
28.4%
US
34.1%

	ME	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	260	32
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.2%	38
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.1%	21
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	28.4%	18
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	51.4%	32



Priority Ranking

45

Notable


Maryland

Every rural school district in Maryland is large and just under one in six schools are rural. No state has larger rural schools and districts than Maryland, and its rural students are some of the most diverse in the United States. Maryland's almost 60,000 rural students rank 33rd as compared to total enrollment numbers of rural students in other states, and they account for about 7% of the state's total population

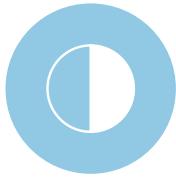
of school-aged children. As compared to the graduation rates of their non-rural peers, the state is one of the best at graduating rural students from high school—students in rural Maryland schools are almost 6 percentage points more likely to graduate than their non-rural peers, an advantage that is significantly above the rural graduation advantage U.S. average of 2.6 percentage points.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK	
				46	
				MD	RANK
Percent rural schools				16.1%	44
Percent small rural districts				0.0%	46
Percent rural students				6.8%	42
Number of rural students				59,577	33
Percent of state education funds to rural districts				7.1%	42

Percent small rural districts



MD
0.0%
US
50.0%

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				42	
				MD	RANK
Diversity index				49.1%	5
Poverty level in rural school communities				419%	44
Percent of rural students with IEP				12.2%	46
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty				8.5%	39
Percent of rural household mobility				8.4%	31


Percent rural household mobility



MD
8.4%
US
9.7%

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK	
				20	
				MD	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil				\$8,816	38
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures				\$9.89	16
Median organizational scale (x100)				71,488	1
State revenue to schools per local dollar				\$1.11	21
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE				\$86,516	39


Median organizational scale (x 100)



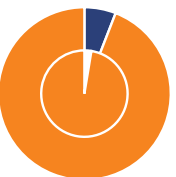
MD
71,488
US
2,651

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				45	
				MD	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)				NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)				NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)				0.111	31
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)				0.232	41
HS grad rate rural advantage				5.9%	44


HS grad rate rural advantage



MD
5.9%
US
2.6%

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK	
				40	
				MD	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor				252	36
Percent of rural households without broadband access				10.9%	31
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance				3.7%	42
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool				25.1%	9
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female				51.7%	33

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



MD
25.1%
US
34.1%

Priority Ranking

48

Notable

Massachusetts

Although there are few rural schools in Massachusetts, rural schools serve around 74,000 rural students. The state is marked by very low rates of poverty, both on measures of poverty rates in rural school communities as well as on measures of the percentage of the state's school age children who live in homes with incomes below the poverty line. No state

has fewer uninsured rural children. NAEP scores for rural fourth and eighth graders are some of the best in the United States. Rural students in the state benefit from the rural graduation advantage and are almost 6 percentage points more likely to graduate from high school than their non-rural peers. This is more than double the rural U.S. average of 2.6 percentage points.

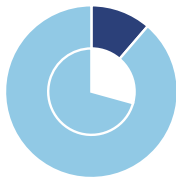
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
42

Percent rural schools



MA
11.3%
US
29.3%

	MA	RANK
Percent rural schools	11.3%	49
Percent small rural districts	37.7%	28
Percent rural students	8.6%	38
Number of rural students	73,828	32
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	8.5%	38



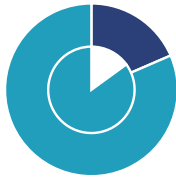
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
38

Percent rural students with IEP



MA
18.5%
US
15.0%

	MA	RANK
Diversity index	26.7%	25
Poverty level in rural school communities	526%	48
Percent of rural students with IEP	18.5%	4
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	6.6%	45
Percent of rural household mobility	8.6%	29



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
33

Median organizational scale (x 100)



MA
4,290
US
2,651

	MA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$11,165	43
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.44	23
Median organizational scale (x100)	4,290	18
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.64	6
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$93,499	45



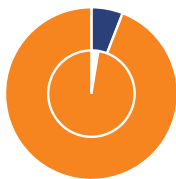
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
47

HS grad rate rural advantage



MA
5.8%
US
2.6%

	MA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.305	44
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.579	47
HS grad rate rural advantage	5.8%	43



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
48

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



MA
49.4%
US
50.4%

	MA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	210	43
Percent of rural households without broadband access	6.5%	47
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	1.1%	50
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	42.0%	40
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.4%	21



Michigan

At nearly a quarter million students, Michigan serves a very large absolute number of rural students, but they make up less than one in five of the total student population. Only six states have a greater disparity between the proportional size of the rural enrollment and the proportional funding that goes toward educating rural students—18.2% of Michigan’s students are in rural districts, but only 16.9% of the state funding goes to rural districts. The most pressing indicator for Michigan

in this report is rural student access to school psychologists and school counselors. Across rural school districts in the state, on average, one school counselor or school psychologist serves 571 students. This is 84% worse than the rural average and the lowest professional-to-student ratio among all states. Achievement data for fourth and eighth-grade rural students experiencing poverty and all rural students ranks in the middle compared to other U.S. states.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
28

Percent small rural districts



MI
38.3%
US
50.0%

	MI	RANK
Percent rural schools	28.7%	31
Percent small rural districts	38.3%	27
Percent rural students	18.2%	27
Number of rural students	226,003	10
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	16.9%	33



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
36

Percent rural household mobility



MI
9.0%
US
9.7%

	MI	RANK
Diversity index	22.3%	33
Poverty level in rural school communities	277%	22
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.5%	38
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.4%	29
Percent of rural household mobility	9.0%	28



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
35

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



MI
\$6,613
US
\$7,174

	MI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,613	20
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$12.41	36
Median organizational scale (x100)	2,651	25
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.65	34
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$75,431	25



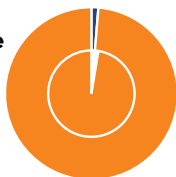
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
22

HS grad rate rural advantage



MI
1.3%
US
2.6%

	MI	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	20.5	23
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	15.3	30
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.033	22
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.013	25
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.3%	17



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
34

Students per psychologist/school counselor



MI
574
US
310

	MI	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	574	1
Percent of rural households without broadband access	12.5%	26
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.4%	32
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	38.7%	35
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	58.6%	46



Priority Ranking

38

Notable

Minnesota

The percentage of Minnesota's children who attend rural schools is above the U.S. average. Minnesota provides proportionally less funding to rural districts relative to the size of its rural student enrollment and is one of 14 states with the most disparity. The state is marked by low rates of poverty, both on measures of poverty rates in rural school communities as well as on measures of the percentage of the state's school age

children who live in homes with incomes below the poverty line. Students living in lower income households face particularly strong educational barriers as evidenced by their lower NAEP scores in reading and math compared to their rural peers who live in higher-income households. Rural student access to school counselors and school psychologists is critical at an average ratio of 400 students to one professional.

GAUGE 1

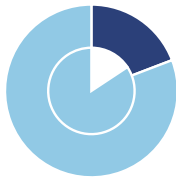
Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE IMPORTANT VERY IMPORTANT CRUCIAL

RANK

27

Percent rural students



MN
19.2%
US
15.7%

	MN	RANK
Percent rural schools	34.2%	27
Percent small rural districts	40.8%	26
Percent rural students	19.2%	25
Number of rural students	152,930	21
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	19.1%	27



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK

41

Rural diversity index



MN
24.1%
US
33.4%

	MN	RANK
Diversity index	24.1%	30
Poverty level in rural school communities	322%	40
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.1%	13
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	7.5%	43
Percent of rural household mobility	8.3%	33



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE IMPORTANT VERY IMPORTANT CRUCIAL

RANK

41

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



MN
\$7,712
US
\$7,174

	MN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,712	30
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.76	15
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,507	29
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.71	41
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$82,814	35



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK

19

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



MN
22.6
US
18.2

	MN	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	23.5	14
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	22.6	8
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.143	36
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.031	26
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.2%	22



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK

36

Students per psychologist/school counselor



MN
400
US
310

	MN	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	400	7
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.8%	32
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.4%	32
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	47.9%	46
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	50.7%	27



Priority Ranking

1

Leading

Mississippi

For two decades of this report, Mississippi has been the leading priority state in *Why Rural Matters* except for 2009 when it ranked number three. Over half of the public schools in Mississippi are located in a rural area, and over half of public-school students in Mississippi attend school in a rural school district. Resource equity is a serious issue given that Mississippi spends on average \$2,000 less on the education of a rural student than other states. Teacher salaries are \$13,000 below the U.S. rural average and over \$17,000 below the average

for all teachers in the United States, even after adjusting for local wage differences. Compounding disadvantage, over one in five rural Mississippi households lack basic internet access, and almost 7% of rural school aged children are uninsured. While these conditions should be balanced by greater mental health support to Mississippi's rural children, there is only one psychologist or counselor for every 436 children, the fifth most concerning ratio in the United States.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
7

Percent state education funds to rural districts



MS
51.0%
US
16.2%

	MS	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.2%	11
Percent small rural districts	1.3%	45
Percent rural students	50.3%	2
Number of rural students	219,613	12
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	51.0%	2



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
14

Poverty level in rural school communities



MS
256%
US
291%

	MS	RANK
Diversity index	38.1%	17
Poverty level in rural school communities	256%	14
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.3%	22
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	21.7%	4
Percent of rural household mobility	6.1%	45



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
3

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



MS
\$5,278
US
\$7,174

	MS	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,278	2
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.80	26
Median organizational scale (x100)	12,837	11
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.35	31
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$63,562	3



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
10

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



MS
25.7
US
18.2

	MS	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	22.7	15
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	25.7	2
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.125	12
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.025	21
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.5%	25



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
5

Percent of rural households without broadband access



MS
20.6%
US
13.4%

	MS	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	436	5
Percent of rural households without broadband access	20.6%	2
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.6%	17
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.6%	25
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	50.8%	28



Priority Ranking

5

Leading

Missouri

Over 180,000 rural students attend public PK-12 schools in Missouri. This number is almost double the rural U.S. average. Exactly 44% of the state's schools are rural and they serve more than one in five of Missouri's students. Missouri spends less than \$6,000 per rural pupil, which is only 81% of the rural U.S. average. Rural Missouri students attend schools in communities with high poverty rates. Only seven states have higher rates of school community poverty. Even though

rural school communities are likely to have high rates of poverty, schools are disproportionately funded by local sources of revenue. Rural teacher salaries are critically low. Missouri teachers make almost \$14,000 less than their rural peers in other states—only Arkansas pays teachers less. Rural NAEP scores for fourth and eighth graders are low for reading (ranking 15) and middle for math (ranking 25).

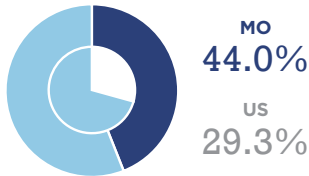
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
15

Percent rural schools



	MO	RANK
Percent rural schools	44.0%	17
Percent small rural districts	64.4%	16
Percent rural students	21.2%	23
Number of rural students	183,200	15
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	23.8%	22



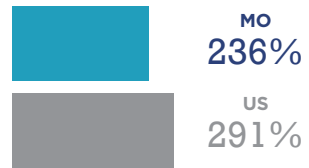
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
18

Poverty level in rural school communities



	MO	RANK
Diversity index	16.8%	44
Poverty level in rural school communities	236%	8
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.7%	27
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.0%	17
Percent of rural household mobility	9.9%	20



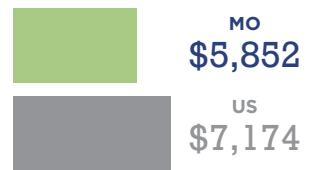
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
4

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



	MO	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,852	10
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.04	19
Median organizational scale (x100)	921	37
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.75	10
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$62,487	2



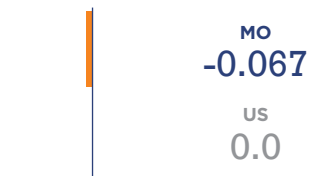
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
25

Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)



	MO	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	15.5	37
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	19.5	18
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.048	25
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.067	15
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.4%	24



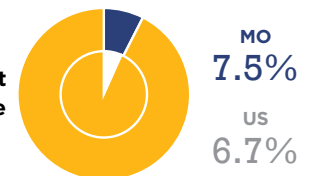
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
13

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	MO	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	287	23
Percent of rural households without broadband access	15.8%	9
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	7.5%	15
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	44.6%	41
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.3%	11



Priority Ranking

24

Major

Montana

Only South Dakota has a higher proportional share of rural schools than Montana, but only nine states have fewer rural students than Montana's total of just under 50,000. Montana's rural student population is about half of the median for all 50 states (94,593). While the percentage of rural children who live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line is relatively low at just over one in ten, student mobility is high with one in ten students changing residences per year. Rural

student NAEP scores for reading and math rank about in the middle of all 50 states, but the scores of Montana's rural eighth graders living in lower-income households are far less robust, ranking 10th in priority for math achievement and 20th for reading. Access to key supports is mixed, with the ninth highest rate of uninsured children along with two other indicators above the midpoint of states and the other two indicators below.

GAUGE 1

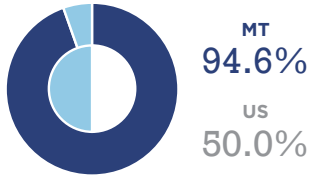
Importance of Rural Education



RANK

5

Percent small rural districts



	MT	RANK
Percent rural schools	73.8%	2
Percent small rural districts	94.6%	1
Percent rural students	33.0%	8
Number of rural students	49,168	40
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	36.4%	9



GAUGE 2

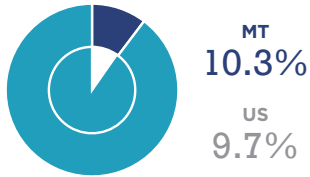
Student and Family Diversity



RANK

35

Percent rural household mobility



	MT	RANK
Diversity index	21.7%	35
Poverty level in rural school communities	267%	19
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.2%	42
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.1%	30
Percent of rural household mobility	10.3%	17



GAUGE 3

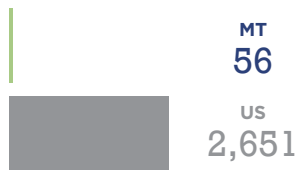
Educational Policy Context



RANK

36

Median organizational scale (x 100)



	MT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,918	31
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.36	21
Median organizational scale (x100)	56	49
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.98	17
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$74,047	23



GAUGE 4

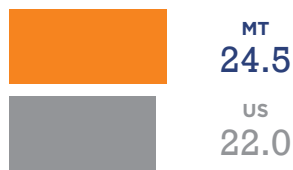
Educational Outcomes



RANK

21

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



	MT	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	24.5	10
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	19.4	20
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.049	26
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.038	27
HS grad rate rural advantage	3.1%	31



GAUGE 5

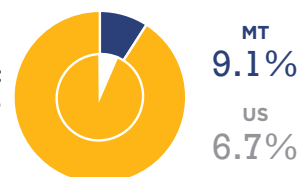
Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK

17

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	MT	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	253	35
Percent of rural households without broadband access	12.8%	24
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.1%	9
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	28.3%	17
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.1%	19



Priority Ranking

44

Notable

Nebraska

Just over half of Nebraska's schools are rural and most are small. These schools serve about 77,000 public PK-12 students which is substantially less than the median of about 95,000 for all U.S. states. Nebraska has the highest percentage of rural children enrolled in public preschool of any state. Fewer than 6% of rural school-aged children live in homes with incomes below the federal poverty line; only Rhode Island and Utah have lower rates. Poverty rates in rural school

communities are relatively low as well, ranking 35th. Nebraska has the greatest disparity of funding given the percent of rural students in the state relative to the percent of state expenditures that goes to rural districts. Likewise, the ratio of state-to-local funding to educate rural students is critical at \$0.28 of state support to \$1.00 of local funding. No other state relies as heavily on local funding to educate its rural students.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

11

Percent small rural districts



NE
77.9%
US
50.0%

	NE	RANK
Percent rural schools	51.5%	8
Percent small rural districts	77.9%	3
Percent rural students	23.6%	21
Number of rural students	77,163	29
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	17.8%	29



GAUGE 2

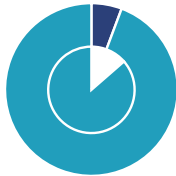
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

46

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



NE
5.7%
US
13.6%

	NE	RANK
Diversity index	20.2%	38
Poverty level in rural school communities	311%	35
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.3%	31
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	5.7%	48
Percent of rural household mobility	7.9%	38



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

44

State revenue to schools per local dollar



NE
\$0.28
US
\$1.18

	NE	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$8,970	39
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$16.69	45
Median organizational scale (x100)	421	46
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.28	1
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$82,523	34



GAUGE 4

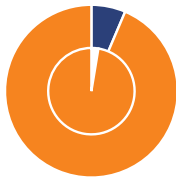
Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

44

HS grad rate rural advantage



NE
6.4%
US
2.6%

	NE	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	19.2	28
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	12.8	36
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.306	45
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.133	36
HS grad rate rural advantage	6.4%	46



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

42

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



NE
57.8%
US
34.1%

	NE	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	236	40
Percent of rural households without broadband access	12.8%	24
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.9%	23
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	57.8%	50
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	50.0%	25



Priority Ranking

19

Major

Nevada

Nevada has the lowest absolute number of rural students among all states with available data. Its rural students are some of the most racially diverse and more than one in ten rural students have changed residences in the past year. The ratio of transportation expenses to instructional expenditures is at a critical level; only West Virginia has a more burdensome transportation cost. About one in five of Nevada's preschool aged children is enrolled in public preschool—only two states

have lower public preschool enrollment. Eighth-grade NAEP scores for rural students who live in lower income households are very low relative to the scores of their wealthier peers. This economic disparity shows up in reading, ranking 5th in priority, and in math, ranking 13th. In Nevada, rural high school students are 3 percentage points less likely to graduate from high school than their non-rural peers in the state.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
48

Percent small rural districts



NV
50.0%
US
50.0%

	NV	RANK
Percent rural schools	18.0%	40
Percent small rural districts	50.0%	22
Percent rural students	1.9%	49
Number of rural students	8,048	49
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	3.8%	48



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
11

Percent rural household mobility



NV
11.3%
US
9.7%

	NV	RANK
Diversity index	51.7%	4
Poverty level in rural school communities	256%	14
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.8%	26
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.0%	32
Percent of rural household mobility	11.3%	8



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
10

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



NV
\$6.96
US
\$11.09

	NV	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,453	29
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$6.96	2
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,338	32
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.98	17
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$72,202	18



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
10

HS grad rate rural advantage



NV
-3.0%
US
2.6%

	NV	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	23.9	13
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	24.7	5
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.036	19
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.132	35
HS grad rate rural advantage	-3.0%	3



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
18

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



NV
20.3%
US
34.1%

	NV	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	NA	NA
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.5%	35
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	8.9%	11
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	20.3%	3
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	52.9%	38



Priority Ranking

37

Significant

New Hampshire

Over half of New Hampshire's schools are rural, serving about a third of the state's children. New Hampshire's rural schools are disproportionately funded by local sources of income—only three other states rely more on the local tax bases for school funding. Likewise, the state ranks eighth in priority regarding the share of the state's budget (about 37%) that is spent to educate New Hampshire's rural children. Per pupil

instructional spending, however, is relatively high at almost \$12,000, well above the United States average of \$7,174. Of critical importance is the underrepresentation of girls in gifted education programs in rural schools. The participation rate of rural New Hampshire girls in gifted education programming is more than 9 percentage points lower than the rate for boys.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

9

Percent rural students



NH
32.4%
US
15.7%

	NH	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.4%	10
Percent small rural districts	66.1%	14
Percent rural students	32.4%	10
Number of rural students	53,247	36
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	36.8%	8



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

45

Rural diversity index



NH
14.6%
US
33.4%

	NH	RANK
Diversity index	14.6%	46
Poverty level in rural school communities	435%	45
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.9%	8
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	8.1%	40
Percent of rural household mobility	7.7%	40



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

39

State revenue to schools per local dollar



NH
\$0.45
US
\$1.18

	NH	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$11,624	45
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.38	30
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,406	30
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.45	4
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$84,935	37



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

39

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



NH
24.1
US
22.0

	NH	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	24.1	12
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	15.1	33
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.120	33
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.207	40
HS grad rate rural advantage	3.8%	33



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

30

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



NH
45.4%
US
50.4%

	NH	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	149	48
Percent of rural households without broadband access	7.9%	44
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.0%	28
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	24.1%	7
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	45.4%	2



Priority Ranking

47

Notable

New Jersey

Given New Jersey's proximity to some of the largest urban centers in the United States, it is no surprise that only one in 12 schools is located in a rural area and only one in 17 students attends school in a rural district. These districts are more likely than not to be small, racially diverse, and serve a relatively affluent population. Over one in

five rural students qualifies for special education services, and per pupil spending on instruction is among the highest in the United States. Overall, New Jersey's rural students receive some of the best access to supports for learning and development and perform well on standardized tests in both reading and math.

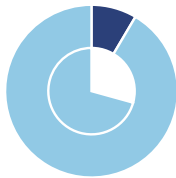
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
43

Percent rural schools



NJ
8.5%
US
29.3%

	NJ	RANK
Percent rural schools	8.5%	50
Percent small rural districts	56.2%	20
Percent rural students	5.9%	44
Number of rural students	75,248	30
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	5.9%	45



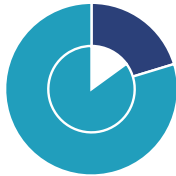
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
28

Percent rural students with IEP



NJ
20.3%
US
15.0%

	NJ	RANK
Diversity index	43.8%	11
Poverty level in rural school communities	502%	47
Percent of rural students with IEP	20.3%	2
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	6.5%	46
Percent of rural household mobility	9.5%	27



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
31

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



NJ
\$10.94
US
\$11.09

	NJ	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$12,399	46
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.94	27
Median organizational scale (x100)	3,642	20
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.69	8
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$79,376	32



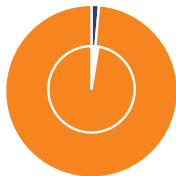
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
43

HS grad rate rural advantage



NJ
1.4%
US
2.6%

	NJ	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.409	46
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.413	45
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.4%	19



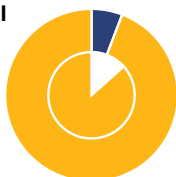
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
50

Percent of rural households without broadband access



NJ
5.8%
US
13.4%

	NJ	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	193	44
Percent of rural households without broadband access	5.8%	48
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	2.6%	47
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	41.8%	39
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	55.1%	40



Priority Ranking

14

Major

New Mexico

New Mexico's rural school districts are characterized by their small size, extreme levels of poverty at both the student and school community level, and an ongoing connectivity crisis where one in five students still lack basic internet access. Given these substantial barriers, it is no surprise that these rural students finish last in the United States on standardized math and reading tests. Although educational

outcomes are low in general, poverty compounds the challenges in math and reading for New Mexico's rural students—many of whom identify as Native American. Students in such conditions are in the most need of support and yet there are over 350 students sharing each psychologist or counselor and one in 13 rural students lacks health insurance coverage.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE

IMPORTANT

VERY IMPORTANT

CRUCIAL

RANK
32

Percent small rural districts



NM
70.9%
US
50.0%

	NM	RANK
Percent rural schools	37.8%	23
Percent small rural districts	70.9%	11
Percent rural students	15.0%	32
Number of rural students	44,820	42
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	16.9%	31



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR

SERIOUS

CRITICAL

URGENT

RANK
9

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



NM
24.4%
US
13.6%

	NM	RANK
Diversity index	26.7%	25
Poverty level in rural school communities	185%	1
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.6%	20
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	24.4%	1
Percent of rural household mobility	8.3%	33



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE

IMPORTANT

VERY IMPORTANT

CRUCIAL

RANK
40

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



NM
\$6,197
US
\$7,174

	NM	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,197	14
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.67	25
Median organizational scale (x100)	624	43
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$3.34	46
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$73,897	21



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR

SERIOUS

CRITICAL

URGENT

RANK
1

Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)



NM
-0.591
US
0.0

	NM	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	22.6	16
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	24.6	6
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.591	1
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.440	1
HS grad rate rural advantage	0.6%	13



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR

SERIOUS

CRITICAL

URGENT

RANK
7

Percent of rural households without broadband access



NM
21.4%
US
13.4%

	NM	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	359	16
Percent of rural households without broadband access	21.4%	1
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.9%	16
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	36.4%	30
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.2%	20



Priority Ranking

43

Notable

New York

Although only one in nine students in New York attends school in a rural district, this still results in nearly 300,000 rural students. Instructional spending on these students is the highest in the U.S. but transportation costs are also high, and one in seven of these students lives in a household with an income below the federal poverty line. Rural students living in lower income households appear to need more

support in reading than they do in math, at least relative to their rural peers in other states. New York's rural students receive some of the best access to supports for learning and development in the country—this may explain in part why their rural students graduate at a rate over 5 percentage points higher than New York's non-rural students.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
31

Percent small rural districts



NY
34.1%
US
50.0%

	NY	RANK
Percent rural schools	16.6%	42
Percent small rural districts	34.1%	30
Percent rural students	11.6%	36
Number of rural students	276,293	6
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	22.0%	24



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
32

Percent rural students with IEP



NY
17.4%
US
15.0%

	NY	RANK
Diversity index	25.4%	29
Poverty level in rural school communities	343%	43
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.4%	12
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.3%	19
Percent of rural household mobility	7.9%	38



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
41

State revenue to schools per local dollar



NY
\$1.19
US
\$1.18

	NY	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$14,731	49
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$8.85	7
Median organizational scale (x100)	3,086	22
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.19	23
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$109,665	49



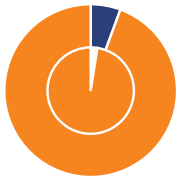
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
35

HS grad rate rural advantage



NY
5.6%
US
2.6%

	NY	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	15.6	36
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	21.1	16
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.035	20
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.098	31
HS grad rate rural advantage	5.6%	42



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
45

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



NY
55.2%
US
50.4%

	NY	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	186	45
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.6%	33
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.4%	32
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	31.8%	23
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	55.2%	42



Priority Ranking

10

Leading

North Carolina

Even with changes from our last report in the indicators measuring the health of its rural education system, North Carolina continues to rank among the states most in need of critical examination. With over one in three students attending school in a rural district, North Carolina's total rural student enrollment is second only to Texas. Compared to their rural peers in other states, these students are much more likely to live in a household with an income below the federal

poverty line, attend a racially diverse school in a poorer community, and move residences often. Schools and districts are large, instructional spending on students is low, and the state is one of the few places where rural students graduate high school at a lower rate than their non-rural peers. Access to supports is on par with peers in other states, except for low enrollment in public preschool and inadequate internet connectivity.

GAUGE 1

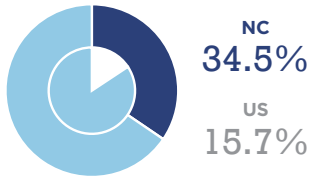
Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

8

Percent rural students



	NC	RANK
Percent rural schools	42.1%	18
Percent small rural districts	2.7%	41
Percent rural students	34.5%	7
Number of rural students	481,044	2
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	37.3%	7



GAUGE 2

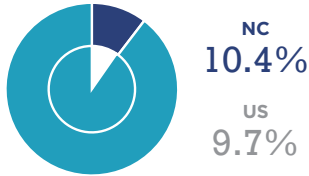
Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

6

Percent rural household mobility



	NC	RANK
Diversity index	52.7%	3
Poverty level in rural school communities	257%	16
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.2%	32
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.2%	9
Percent of rural household mobility	10.4%	14



GAUGE 3

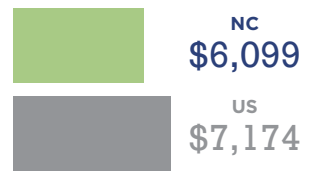
Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK

29

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



	NC	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,099	12
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$15.14	44
Median organizational scale (x100)	33,884	3
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.90	43
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$76,041	27



GAUGE 4

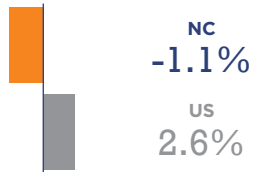
Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

20

HS grad rate rural advantage



	NC	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	18.0	31
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	15.3	30
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.032	21
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.064	16
HS grad rate rural advantage	-1.1%	9



GAUGE 5

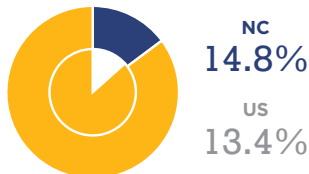
Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK

16

Percent of rural households without broadband access



	NC	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	281	24
Percent of rural households without broadband access	14.8%	13
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.3%	27
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	27.5%	15
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.8%	24



North Dakota

Despite having a relatively small total rural student population, North Dakota is one of the most rural states. Two out of three schools are located in a rural area, and five out of six rural districts are smaller than the median U.S. rural district. These smaller districts do not have the level of diversity and poverty as the rural areas of many other states, but nearly one in seven rural North Dakota students has moved within the last

year—presenting challenges to both students and teachers. Reasonable amounts of funding are provided for student instruction, but North Dakota's rural teachers are among the lowest paid in the United States. Educational outcomes and access to key supports are all on par with other states, except for the high number of rural children who are uninsured.

GAUGE 1

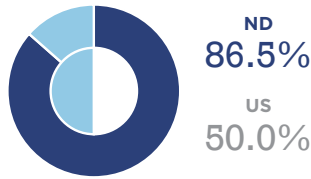
Importance of Rural Education



RANK

6

Percent small rural districts



	ND	RANK
Percent rural schools	67.5%	4
Percent small rural districts	86.5%	2
Percent rural students	36.4%	6
Number of rural students	42,473	43
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	39.5%	6



GAUGE 2

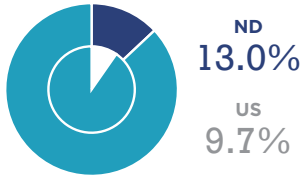
Student and Family Diversity



RANK

39

Percent rural household mobility



	ND	RANK
Diversity index	19.5%	40
Poverty level in rural school communities	326%	41
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.3%	39
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	10.5%	34
Percent of rural household mobility	13.0%	3



GAUGE 3

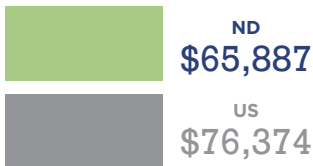
Educational Policy Context



RANK

29

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



	ND	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$8,244	35
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.37	14
Median organizational scale (x100)	268	47
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.28	27
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$65,887	6



GAUGE 4

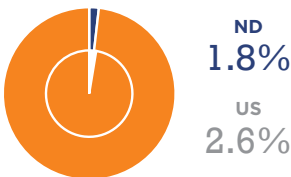
Educational Outcomes



RANK

33

HS grad rate rural advantage



	ND	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	19.5	26
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	15.2	32
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.113	32
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.024	23
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.8%	20



GAUGE 5

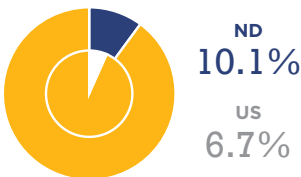
Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK

19

Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	ND	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	276	25
Percent of rural households without broadband access	13.1%	23
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	10.1%	4
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	40.9%	37
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	49.7%	23



Priority Ranking

31

Significant

Ohio

More than 360,000 Ohio students are enrolled in rural school districts, the fourth largest absolute rural student enrollment in the U.S. The rural student population is relatively homogeneous, ranking below or near the U.S. median on every diversity indicator. Educational policy issues are a concern, with inequitable funding, large schools and districts, and high transportation costs. Equity in the distribution of educational outcomes

of rural students is near or below the median on all measures (with the rural poverty difference in grade 8 math meriting concern at a rank of 20th). Access to learning and development supports is an urgent concern, with among the highest state rates of uninsured rural children (10th highest), rural families without broadband access (16th highest), and ratio of students per psychologist/school counselor (19th highest).

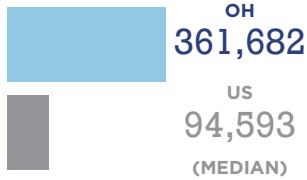
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
23

Number of rural students



	OH	RANK
Percent rural schools	30.2%	30
Percent small rural districts	8.1%	35
Percent rural students	23.5%	22
Number of rural students	361,682	4
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	24.9%	20



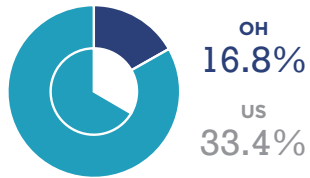
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
44

Rural diversity index



	OH	RANK
Diversity index	16.8%	44
Poverty level in rural school communities	306%	33
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.3%	22
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.6%	27
Percent of rural household mobility	6.9%	44



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
21

State revenue to schools per local dollar



	OH	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,051	26
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$10.20	20
Median organizational scale (x100)	4,356	17
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.86	12
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$88,542	41



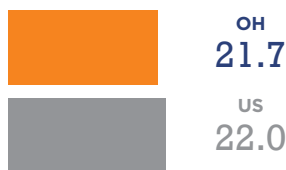
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
42

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



	OH	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	21.7	20
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	14.9	34
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.237	40
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.199	39
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.6%	27



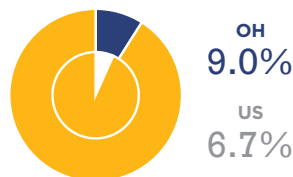
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
12

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	OH	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	339	19
Percent of rural households without broadband access	14.3%	16
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.0%	10
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	41.0%	38
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.4%	12



Priority Ranking

8

Leading

Oklahoma

Oklahoma's rural districts are ranked as our eighth highest overall priority in the United States—down from fourth in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019*. More than half of all public schools serve rural communities, and its students are among the most diverse in the United States in terms of race, special education needs, poverty, and residential instability. Only five states spend less than the state's \$5,614 per rural pupil on instruction, and adjusted teacher salaries are nearly \$11,000 below

the U.S. average. Academic performance is mixed, with rural NAEP grade 4 and 8 composites among the 10 most urgent states on math and reading. Access to learning and development supports is a critical concern, with among the highest state rates of rural families without broadband access (11th highest), uninsured rural children (12th highest), and ratio of students per psychologist/school counselor (17th).

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK

3

Percent rural schools



OK
53.4%
us
29.3%

	OK	RANK
Percent rural schools	53.4%	7
Percent small rural districts	71.5%	8
Percent rural students	29.2%	14
Number of rural students	186,457	14
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	31.4%	14



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK

2

Percent rural students with IEP



OK
19.0%
us
15.0%

	OK	RANK
Diversity index	55.5%	2
Poverty level in rural school communities	245%	13
Percent of rural students with IEP	19.0%	3
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.5%	15
Percent of rural household mobility	10.4%	14



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK

27

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



OK
\$65,514
us
\$76,374

	OK	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,614	6
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$18.51	47
Median organizational scale (x100)	671	41
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.22	24
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$65,514	5



GAUGE 4

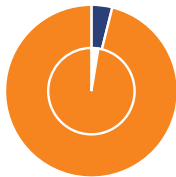
Educational Outcomes



RANK

26

HS grade rate rural advantage



OK
3.9%
us
2.6%

	OK	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	13.1	38
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	11.0	37
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.181	8
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.200	4
HS grad rate rural advantage	3.9%	34



GAUGE 5

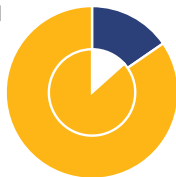
Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK

20

Percent of rural households without broadband access



OK
15.4%
us
13.4%

	OK	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	349	17
Percent of rural households without broadband access	15.4%	11
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	8.8%	12
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	47.7%	45
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	50.8%	28



Priority Ranking

13

Leading

Oregon

Ranking in the most concerning quartile on two of five gauges and in the next highest quartile on two others, Oregon is the 13th highest priority state in this year's report. The state's rural student population represents less than 10% of all students, but they are diverse and experience higher than average levels of poverty. The policy context is less than favorable, with lower than average instructional expenditures and teacher salaries along with the sixth heaviest transportation

expenditure burden in the United States. Oregon ranks in the highest priority quartile on each of the three outcome indicators for which data were available. Access to supports for learning and development is of greater concern than in all but nine other states—including the lowest rate of participation in public preschool, 12th lowest representation of female students receiving gifted services, and 13th highest ratio of students to school psychologists/counselors.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
37

Percent small rural districts



OR
63.1%
US
50.0%

	OR	RANK
Percent rural schools	26.1%	33
Percent small rural districts	63.1%	17
Percent rural students	9.6%	37
Number of rural students	52,143	37
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	10.6%	37



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
15

Rural diversity index



OR
38.0%
US
33.4%

	OR	RANK
Diversity index	38.0%	18
Poverty level in rural school communities	268%	20
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.3%	22
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.2%	20
Percent of rural household mobility	9.6%	24



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
21

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



OR
\$8.59
US
\$11.09

	OR	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,666	22
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$8.59	6
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,364	31
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.68	35
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$74,003	22



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
3

HS grad rate rural advantage



OR
-1.4%
US
2.6%

	OR	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.156	11
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.102	11
HS grad rate rural advantage	-1.4%	7



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
10

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



OR
11.8%
US
34.1%

	OR	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	375	13
Percent of rural households without broadband access	10.4%	36
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.4%	26
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	11.8%	1
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.4%	12



Priority Ranking

30

Significant

Pennsylvania

Over a quarter of a million Pennsylvania students are enrolled in rural school districts, the seventh largest absolute rural student enrollment in the United States. The rural student population is relatively homogeneous, ranking below the U.S. median on every diversity indicator except for the percentage of rural students with an IEP—at more than one in five, a higher proportion of rural students qualify for special education services than in any other state. Instructional spending and teacher salaries are high, but rural schools and

districts face steep transportation costs, are large, and rely heavily on the local tax base for funding. Educational outcomes are better than the U.S. average on all but the rural poverty difference on NAEP reading, where the state ranks 20th. Supports for learning and development are not widely accessible, with health insurance for rural children (6th highest rate of uninsured) and public preschool (14th lowest rate of participation) both prominent concerns.

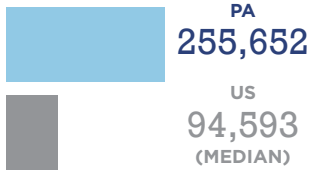
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
29

Number of rural students



	PA	RANK
Percent rural schools	25.5%	34
Percent small rural districts	8.9%	34
Percent rural students	16.9%	29
Number of rural students	255,652	7
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	19.7%	26



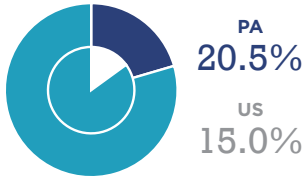
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
36

Percent rural students with IEP



	PA	RANK
Diversity index	20.4%	37
Poverty level in rural school communities	320%	39
Percent of rural students with IEP	20.5%	1
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.1%	30
Percent of rural household mobility	7.0%	43



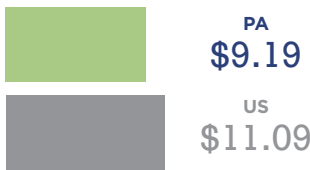
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
24

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



	PA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$9.616	41
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.19	11
Median organizational scale (x100)	6,238	14
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.88	14
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$87,043	40



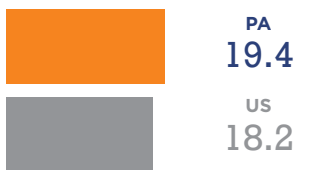
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
40

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



	PA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	18.0	31
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	19.4	20
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.123	34
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.138	37
HS grad rate rural advantage	3.9%	34



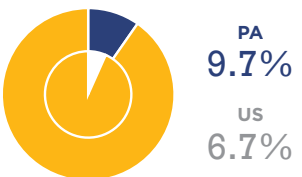
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
6

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	PA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	263	31
Percent of rural households without broadband access	14.4%	15
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.7%	6
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	26.9%	14
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.5%	15



Priority Ranking

49

Notable

Rhode Island

The lowest priority state in the United States based on the *Why Rural Matters* ranking system, Rhode Island ranks in the quartile of least concern on four of five gauges. Although 8% of Rhode Island's students are enrolled in a rural district, these districts receive only 5.4% of state funding for PK-12 education. The state's rural students attend school mostly with students of the same race, in neighborhoods where the average household income is nearly 4.5 times the federal poverty threshold. Instructional spending

per rural pupil is 57.4% higher than the U.S. average, although state funding support is weak relative to local support. Educational outcomes are strong based on the three indicators for which data are available. There is high access to learning and development supports in Rhode Island (second highest rate of broadband access, highest percent of female students receiving gifted services, and third lowest rate of rural uninsured children). One exception is the fifth lowest public preschool participation in the U.S.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
49

Number of rural students



	RI	RANK
Percent rural schools	12.8%	47
Percent small rural districts	33.3%	31
Percent rural students	8.0%	40
Number of rural students	10,138	48
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	5.4%	47



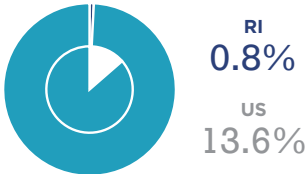
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
49

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



	RI	RANK
Diversity index	17.4%	43
Poverty level in rural school communities	441%	46
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.9%	34
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	0.8%	50
Percent of rural household mobility	NA	NA



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
28

State revenue to schools per local dollar



	RI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$11,293	44
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.96	17
Median organizational scale (x100)	3,710	19
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.36	2
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$91,121	42



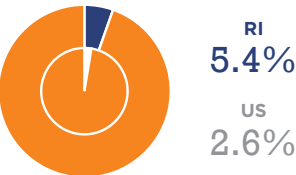
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
46

HS grad rate rural advantage



	RI	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.188	38
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.430	46
HS grad rate rural advantage	5.4%	41



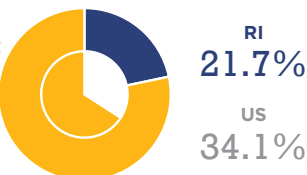
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
47

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



	RI	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	221	41
Percent of rural households without broadband access	5.7%	49
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	1.6%	48
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	21.7%	5
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	62.4%	48



Priority Ranking

8

Leading

South Carolina

Four of every ten schools in South Carolina are located in a rural area, serving just under 17% of the state's public-school students. More than one in five of those 120,000 rural students lives below the federal poverty threshold, and households in the average rural school district neighborhood earn barely double the poverty threshold (third lowest in the United States). South Carolina's rural districts are some of the most racially diverse in the United States, and only six states have higher rural household mobility rates. Instructional spending

and adjusted teacher salaries are well below U.S. averages, and rural South Carolina schools and districts are larger than in nearly all other states. Academic outcomes are among the 10 most urgent across states on four of five indicators. Access to learning and development supports varies, with broadband access the indicator of greatest concern with the seventh highest rate of rural households lacking broadband. Only four states have a higher representation of female students receiving gifted services.

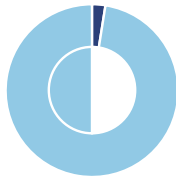
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
33

Percent small rural districts



SC
2.5%
US
50.0%

	SC	RANK
Percent rural schools	40.0%	21
Percent small rural districts	2.5%	42
Percent rural students	16.7%	30
Number of rural students	123,096	23
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	17.1%	30



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
3

Poverty level in rural school communities



SC
218%
US
291%

	SC	RANK
Diversity index	47.0%	9
Poverty level in rural school communities	218%	3
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.1%	25
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	20.5%	6
Percent of rural household mobility	11.5%	7



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
14

Median organizational scale (x 100)



SC
17,574
US
2,651

	SC	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,213	15
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$14.27	42
Median organizational scale (x100)	17,574	8
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.29	28
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$67,314	9



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
2

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



SC
26.9
US
22.0

	SC	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	26.9	3
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	16.4	28
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.190	7
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.126	6
HS grad rate rural advantage	-2.2%	4



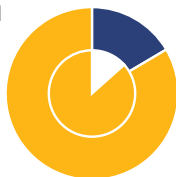
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
26

Percent of rural households without broadband access



SC
16.5%
US
13.4%

	SC	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	267	30
Percent of rural households without broadband access	16.5%	7
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.7%	25
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	29.4%	19
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	56.4%	43



Priority Ranking

18

Major

South Dakota

South Dakota is the second most rural state in the United States, with the vast majority of schools located in a rural area and two in five students enrolled in a rural school district. Although there is not a high degree of racial diversity, rural South Dakota classrooms experience the disruption of one in six students experiencing poverty. As schools across the United States increase instructional spending on rural students, South

Dakota is one of only seven states to decrease spending. On educational outcomes, the gap between South Dakota's rural students from lower and higher income households is stark in both math and reading. Access to learning supports is fairly positive, with 40.6% (rank 36th) of South Dakota children enrolled in public preschool and 51.7% representation of female students receiving gifted services.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

Percent rural schools



SD
74.3%
US
29.3%

	NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
Percent rural schools				
Percent small rural districts				
Percent rural students				
Number of rural students				
Percent of state education funds to rural districts				

SD RANK

	SD	RANK
Percent rural schools	74.3%	1
Percent small rural districts	76.8%	5
Percent rural students	41.5%	4
Number of rural students	58,579	34
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	40.2%	4

RANK

2



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



SD
16.3%
US
13.6%

	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
Diversity index				
Poverty level in rural school communities				
Percent of rural students with IEP				
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty				
Percent of rural household mobility				

SD RANK

	SD	RANK
Diversity index	22.8%	32
Poverty level in rural school communities	287%	25
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.8%	19
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	16.3%	12
Percent of rural household mobility	5.8%	47

RANK

30



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



SD
\$67,753
US
\$76,374

	NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil				
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures				
Median organizational scale (x100)				
State revenue to schools per local dollar				
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE				

SD RANK

	SD	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,482	18
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$12.60	38
Median organizational scale (x100)	239	48
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.55	5
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$67,753	10

RANK

23



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

HS grad rate rural advantage



SD
-1.7%
US
2.6%

	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)				
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)				
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)				
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)				
HS grad rate rural advantage				

SD RANK

	SD	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	24.6	9
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	21.3	15
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.081	27
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.005	24
HS grad rate rural advantage	-1.7%	6

RANK

12



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

Percent of rural school aged children without health insurance



SD
8.3%
US
6.7%

	FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
Students per psychologist/school counselor				
Percent of rural households without broadband access				
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance				
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool				
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female				

SD RANK

	SD	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	269	29
Percent of rural households without broadband access	14.1%	17
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	8.3%	13
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	40.6%	36
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	51.7%	33

RANK

29



Priority Ranking

21

Major

Tennessee

More than one-third of Tennessee public schools are located in rural areas, and the state's 283,188 students make up just under 29% of the total public-school enrollment. Rural schools and districts are large, and rural students are more likely to live well below the federal poverty threshold than rural students in other states. Instructional spending is nearly \$1,500 per rural pupil lower than the U.S. average, and teacher salaries are lower than in all but 15 other states.

Educational outcomes are mostly near or above U.S. averages, and high school graduation rates are better than the non-rural U.S. average (rank 39th). Access to supports for learning and development is a crucial concern, with the state ranking in the top 15 on three indicators, including the fifth lowest rate of female students receiving gifted services, 15.7% of households with no access to broadband, and a ranking of 14th on a ratio of students to psychologist/school counselor.

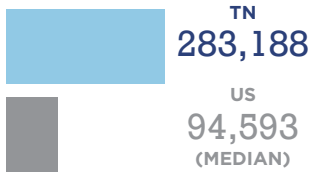
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
18

Number of rural students



	TN	RANK
Percent rural schools	36.1%	25
Percent small rural districts	2.9%	40
Percent rural students	28.8%	15
Number of rural students	283,188	5
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	32.2%	12



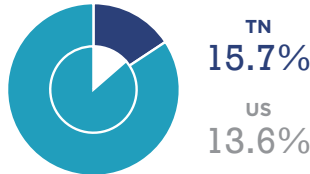
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
27

Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



	TN	RANK
Diversity index	26.1%	28
Poverty level in rural school communities	29.4%	28
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.6%	36
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.7%	14
Percent of rural household mobility	9.8%	23



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
16

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



	TN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,691	9
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$14.13	41
Median organizational scale (x100)	17,540	9
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.49	33
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$71,572	16



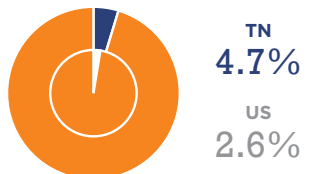
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
31

HS grad rate rural advantage



	TN	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	25.4	5
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	18.7	23
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.141	35
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.065	28
HS grad rate rural advantage	4.7%	39



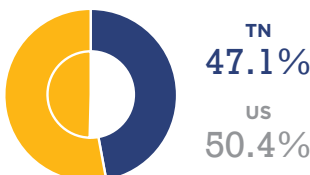
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
8

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



	TN	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	373	14
Percent of rural households without broadband access	15.7%	10
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.2%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	30.2%	21
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	47.1%	5



Priority Ranking

17

Major

Texas

More than three quarters of a million students are enrolled in rural school districts in Texas, by far the largest U.S. rural student enrollment and an increase of nearly 84,000 students since *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019*. Districts are racially diverse and more than one in ten rural students have changed residences in the past year, but very few students qualify for specialized education services. Instructional spending per pupil and teacher salaries are very low, and

state funding levels are inadequate to equalize differences in local wealth. Educational outcomes are mixed, with two indicators below the U.S. average and two above (along with one N/A). Access to learning and development supports is concerning, with the second highest rate of uninsured rural children in the United States and three other indicators where the state falls below the midpoint of states.

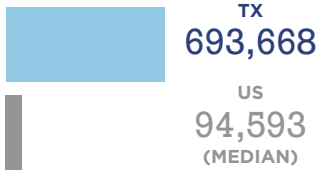
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
25

Number of rural students



	TX	RANK
Percent rural schools	27.2%	32
Percent small rural districts	48.0%	23
Percent rural students	15.4%	31
Number of rural students	777,540	1
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	16.9%	31



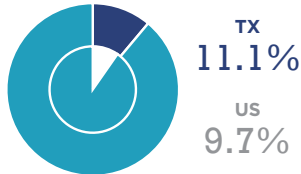
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
24

Percent rural household mobility



	TX	RANK
Diversity index	46.7%	10
Poverty level in rural school communities	314%	36
Percent of rural students with IEP	11.4%	47
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.8%	23
Percent of rural household mobility	11.1%	9



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
12

State revenue to schools per local dollar



	TX	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$5,999	11
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$18.42	46
Median organizational scale (x100)	2,850	23
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.65	7
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$68,368	12



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
23

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



	TX	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	18.8	29
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	10.8	38
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.045	17
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.108	10
HS grad rate rural advantage	NA	NA



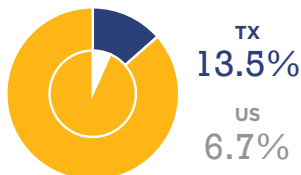
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
10

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	TX	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	337	20
Percent of rural households without broadband access	11.7%	29
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	13.5%	2
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	29.6%	20
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.6%	17



Priority Ranking

41

Notable

Utah

The third least rural state in the U.S. after Rhode Island and Nevada, most of Utah's population (and students) live in densely populated areas. School neighborhoods experience high levels of poverty, and more than one in ten of Utah's rural families with school-aged children have changed residences in the previous year. Instructional spending is low, and schools and districts are large. Educational outcomes are mixed, with two

indicators in the least concerning quartile and one in the most concerning quartile (along with one N/A). Access to learning and development supports reveals high percentages of female representation receiving gifted services (rank 43rd) and access to broadband (rank 46th). However, 5.9% of school-aged children are not insured (rank 23rd).

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
46

Percent rural students



UT
4.2%
US
15.7%

	UT	RANK
Percent rural schools	20.8%	38
Percent small rural districts	30.8%	32
Percent rural students	4.2%	47
Number of rural students	25,609	44
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	5.8%	46



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
18

Percent rural household mobility



UT
10.5%
US
9.7%

	UT	RANK
Diversity index	27.5%	24
Poverty level in rural school communities	242%	12
Percent of rural students with IEP	15.6%	20
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	5.4%	49
Percent of rural household mobility	10.5%	11



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
32

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



UT
\$6,147
US
\$7,147

	UT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,147	13
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$12.54	37
Median organizational scale (x100)	4,485	16
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.48	32
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$83,547	36



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
37

HS grad rate rural advantage



UT
-2.2%
US
2.6%

	UT	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.284	42
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.244	43
HS grad rate rural advantage	-2.2%	4



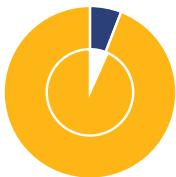
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
44

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



UT
5.9%
US
6.7%

	UT	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	271	28
Percent of rural households without broadband access	6.9%	46
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.9%	23
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.6%	25
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	56.4%	43



Priority Ranking

42

Notable

Vermont

With more than 54% of its students attending school in a rural district, Vermont has the highest percentage of rural students of any state. Rural schools and districts are almost all smaller than the U.S. median (although they have gotten larger in recent years because of consolidation—e.g., median organizational scale has nearly tripled from 400 in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019* to 1,182 in this report). Poverty rates are low and there is

limited racial diversity, but the number of rural students with an IEP is high compared to the U.S. average. Instructional spending is high and the state's contribution to education is dramatically higher than other states. In terms of access to learning and development supports, Vermont ranks among the best of all states with the exception of access to broadband (rank 28th).

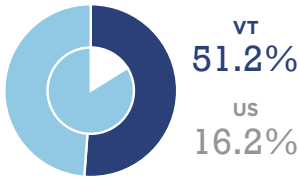
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
4

Percent state education funds to rural districts



	VT	RANK
Percent rural schools	71.2%	3
Percent small rural districts	69.8%	12
Percent rural students	54.4%	1
Number of rural students	45,585	41
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	51.2%	1



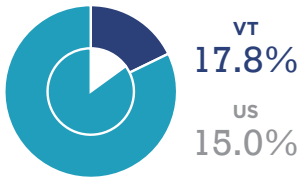
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
47

Percent rural students with IEP



	VT	RANK
Diversity index	13.9%	47
Poverty level in rural school communities	340%	42
Percent of rural students with IEP	17.8%	9
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	6.4%	47
Percent of rural household mobility	5.9%	46



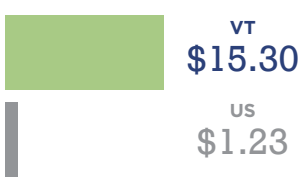
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
46

State revenue to schools per local dollar



	VT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$9,520	40
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$23.66	48
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,182	35
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$15.30	49
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$73,260	19



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
N/A

N/A

	VT	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	NA	NA
HS grad rate rural advantage	NA	NA



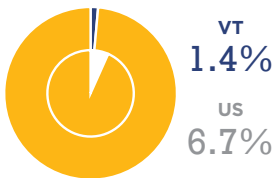
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
49

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	VT	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	169	46
Percent of rural households without broadband access	12.0%	28
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	1.4%	49
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	56.1%	49
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	57.0%	45



Priority Ranking

19

Major

Virginia

More than 227,000 students are enrolled in Virginia's rural school districts, representing nearly one in six of all public school students in the state. The rural student population is among the most diverse in the United States. Students attend large schools and districts that are burdened with high transportation costs that detract from instructional spending. Educational

outcomes are the fifth lowest in the country, with Virginia below the U.S. midpoint on four of five indicators (and among the 10 lowest performing states on three of those). Access to supports for learning and development is mixed, with low rates of uninsured rural children but high rates of rural families with no broadband access and low rates of rural participation in public preschool.

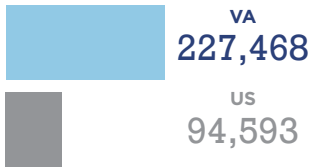
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
30

Number of rural students



	VA	RANK
Percent rural schools	31.8%	29
Percent small rural districts	1.5%	44
Percent rural students	18.2%	27
Number of rural students	227,468	9
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	20.9%	25



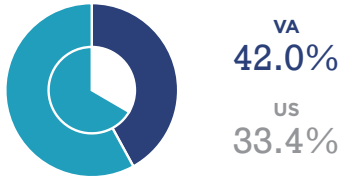
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
24

Rural diversity index



	VA	RANK
Diversity index	42.0%	12
Poverty level in rural school communities	298%	30
Percent of rural students with IEP	13.9%	34
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.7%	25
Percent of rural household mobility	9.6%	24



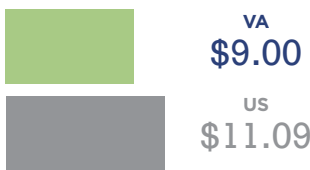
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

RANK
7

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



	VA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,875	24
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$9.00	10
Median organizational scale (x100)	17,914	6
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$1.11	21
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$75,660	26



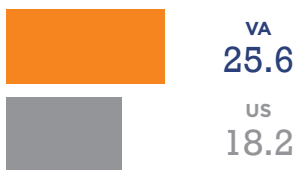
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
5

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



	VA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	25.1	8
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	25.6	3
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.039	18
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.124	7
HS grad rate rural advantage	2.6%	27



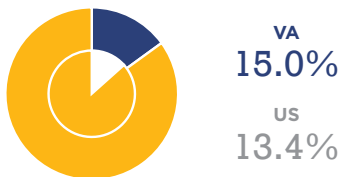
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

RANK
31

Percent rural households without broadband access



	VA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	255	33
Percent of rural households without broadband access	15.0%	12
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.6%	44
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	26.2%	12
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	51.2%	31



Priority Ranking

36

Significant

Washington

Nearly two-thirds of all rural students in Washington are enrolled in a school district with fewer students than the U.S. median for rural districts. Rural students are diverse and school neighborhoods in general are often below the federal poverty threshold, but extreme poverty among students is not as present as in other states. After showing a surge in residential mobility in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019*, Washington's ranking on that indicator has dropped from 3 to 36. Revenue from state

sources is nearly four times the level of local revenue. Rural poverty differences on NAEP are smaller than the majority of states, but rural NAEP composite scores are low (15th lowest for math and 7th lowest for reading). Rural broadband access and healthcare coverage for children are relatively high, but preschool access is a challenge. The availability of psychologists/school counselors is limited in comparison with other states, and girls are underrepresented in gifted services.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE IMPORTANT VERY IMPORTANT CRUCIAL

RANK
35

Percent small rural districts



WA
64.5%
US
50.0%

	WA	RANK
Percent rural schools	21.9%	36
Percent small rural districts	64.5%	15
Percent rural students	7.6%	41
Number of rural students	81,953	27
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	8.1%	40



GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK
32

Rural diversity index



WA
38.5%
US
33.4%

	WA	RANK
Diversity index	38.5%	16
Poverty level in rural school communities	270%	21
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.0%	33
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	10.0%	35
Percent of rural household mobility	8.1%	36



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE IMPORTANT VERY IMPORTANT CRUCIAL

RANK
48

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



WA
\$97,535
US
\$76,374

	WA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$8,415	36
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.67	33
Median organizational scale (x100)	798	38
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$3.87	47
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$97,535	47



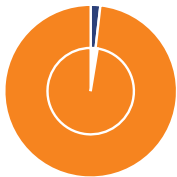
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK
17

HS grad rate rural advantage



WA
1.8%
US
2.6%

	WA	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	18.1	30
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	16.1	29
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.094	15
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.124	7
HS grad rate rural advantage	1.8%	20



GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR SERIOUS CRITICAL URGENT

RANK
24

Percent of rural gifted students who are female



WA
47.1%
US
50.4%

	WA	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	334	21
Percent of rural households without broadband access	9.1%	41
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.7%	42
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	25.7%	11
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	47.1%	5



Priority Ranking

4

Leading

West Virginia

Half of West Virginia's public schools and nearly one in four students are rural, with a student population characterized by high numbers of children experiencing poverty, high rates of identification of special education, and limited racial/ethnic diversity. West Virginia's history of large-scale consolidation has resulted in large schools, large districts, and burdensome transportation costs for rural districts. Rural teacher salaries are nearly \$4,500 below the U.S. average, even after adjusting for comparable

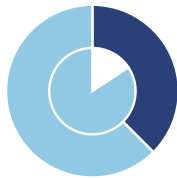
wages of the rural areas. West Virginia's rural students perform well below the U.S. average on NAEP math and reading composite, and their rural high schools have lower graduation rates than the state's non-rural high schools. Access to learning and development supports is mixed, with two indicators (rural broadband access and rural female representation receiving gifted services) in the most urgent quartile and one other (access to public preschool) in the next quartile.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

Percent rural students



WV
37.5%
US
15.7%

	WV	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.2%	11
Percent small rural districts	0.0%	46
Percent rural students	37.5%	5
Number of rural students	94,593	25
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	39.7%	5

RANK
14

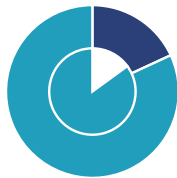


GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



WV
18.1%
US
15.0%

	WV	RANK
Diversity index	12.8%	49
Poverty level in rural school communities	234%	7
Percent of rural students with IEP	18.1%	7
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	16.8%	11
Percent of rural household mobility	7.4%	41

RANK
17



GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL
---------	-----------	----------------	---------

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures



WV
\$6.40
US
\$11.09

	WV	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$6,668	23
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$6.40	1
Median organizational scale (x100)	8,449	13
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$2.03	38
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$71,878	17

RANK
9



GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
------	---------	----------	--------

HS grad rate rural advantage



WV
-1.3%
US
2.6%

	WV	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	12.9	39
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	12.9	35
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.478	3
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	-0.363	2
HS grad rate rural advantage	-1.3%	8

RANK
14

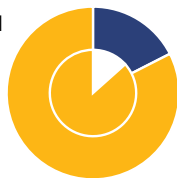


GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT
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Percent of rural households without broadband access



WV
17.5%
US
13.4%

	WV	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	275	26
Percent of rural households without broadband access	17.5%	4
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.8%	41
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	30.7%	22
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	48.0%	8

RANK
14



Priority Ranking

39

Notable

Wisconsin

One in five of Wisconsin's students attends school in a rural district, and the state policy context is near the midpoint of state rankings on three of five indicators (state revenue to schools per local dollar is the exception; at just \$0.82, Wisconsin has the 11th lowest rate of state contribution). Educational outcomes are below average on poverty gap measures and above

average on composite scores. In terms of access to supports for learning and development, Wisconsin ranks below the midpoint for importance on four of five indicators. On the fifth indicator (percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage), the state ranks 19th but is just slightly below the U.S. rate for uninsured rural children.

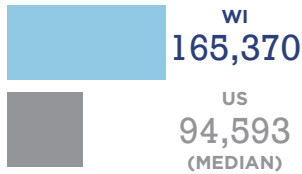
GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education



RANK
26

Number of rural students



	WI	RANK
Percent rural schools	36.6%	24
Percent small rural districts	41.3%	25
Percent rural students	20.0%	24
Number of rural students	163,370	18
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	19.0%	28



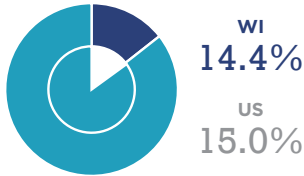
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity



RANK
43

Percent rural students with IEP



	WI	RANK
Diversity index	22.0%	34
Poverty level in rural school communities	308%	34
Percent of rural students with IEP	14.4%	28
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.5%	37
Percent of rural household mobility	8.2%	35



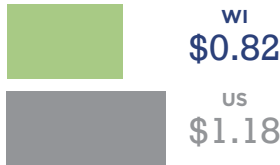
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context



RANK
24

State revenue to schools per local dollar



	WI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	\$7,343	27
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	\$11.15	28
Median organizational scale (x100)	1,303	34
State revenue to schools per local dollar	\$0.82	11
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	\$73,453	20



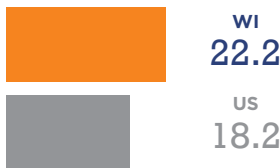
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes



RANK
34

Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)



	WI	RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)	22.6	16
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)	22.2	10
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)	0.263	41
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)	0.113	33
HS grad rate rural advantage	4.0%	36



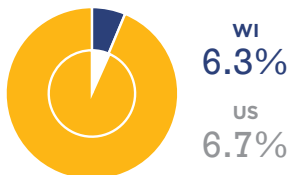
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development



RANK
38

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



	WI	RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor	249	37
Percent of rural households without broadband access	12.4%	27
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.3%	19
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	37.7%	33
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female	51.7%	33



Priority Ranking

33

Significant

Wyoming

More than half of Wyoming's public schools are rural, and more than 28% of the state's educational funds are directed to rural districts. Only three states have higher rural household mobility rates, and 12.3% of rural students experience poverty (with a rank of 26, nearly one and a half times the state rate in *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019*, when the rate was 8.2% and the state ranking was 43rd). The policy context is generally favorable, marked by high instructional

spending and high teacher salaries. Education outcomes are below average on poverty gap measures and above average on composite scores. Access to supports for learning and development is a story of extremes—Wyoming ranks in the highest category of concern on two indicators (access to healthcare coverage for rural children and female student representation in gifted services) and in the lowest category of concern on the other three indicators.

GAUGE 1

Importance of Rural Education

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				24
				WY
				RANK
Percent rural schools		50.7%		9
Percent small rural districts		43.3%		24
Percent rural students		26.2%		17
Number of rural students		24,269		46
Percent of state education funds to rural districts		28.3%		17

Percent rural schools



WY
50.7%
US
29.3%

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Diversity

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				21
				WY
				RANK
Diversity index		23.4%		31
Poverty level in rural school communities		302%		32
Percent of rural students with IEP		14.4%		28
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty		12.3%		26
Percent of rural household mobility		12.5%		4

Percent rural household mobility



WY
12.5%
US
9.7%

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	CRUCIAL	RANK
				45
				WY
				RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil		\$10,797		42
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures		\$10.48		24
Median organizational scale (x100)		1,325		33
State revenue to schools per local dollar		\$1.22		24
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE		\$92,265		43

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



WY
\$10,797
US
\$7,174

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				28
				WY
				RANK
Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)		25.2		7
Rural poverty difference in reading (Gr 8)		21.9		11
Rural NAEP composite math (Gr 4 and 8)		0.210		39
Rural NAEP composite reading (Gr 4 and 8)		0.171		38
HS grad rate rural advantage		2.7%		29

Rural poverty difference in math (Gr 8)



WY
25.2
US
22.0

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Learning and Development

FAIR	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	URGENT	RANK
				32
				WY
				RANK
Students per psychologist/school counselor		220		42
Percent of rural households without broadband access		8.8%		43
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance		13.9%		1
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool		53.9%		47
Percent of rural gifted/talented who are female		45.7%		3

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



WY
13.9%
US
6.7%

Endnotes

ⁱAlthough it is likely that student data was reported according to gender expression-focused categories of girl/woman and boy/man, the dataset uses language that refers to biological sex (i.e., male/female). It is also worth noting that schools were not given the option of submitting data on students identifying as non-binary.

ⁱⁱIn the Common Core of Data, race and ethnicity are divided into seven categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black or African American, White, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Two or More Races. Although there are several problems with how these categories are divided and overlap, we maintain their use for a rough measure of racial diversity in our diversity index. We also acknowledge the ongoing discussion regarding the capitalization of “White,” but have chosen to capitalize here for consistency with the datasets used.

ⁱⁱⁱNational Rural Education Association. (2022). National Rural Education Association research agenda – 2022–2027. *The Rural Educator*, 37(3), 67–69. <https://journals.library.msstate.edu/index.php/ruraled/article/view/236/220>

^{iv}This is the U.S. average for rural districts on the grade 4 and grade 8 NAEP math tests. State-level values used throughout the report are standardized values based on this U.S.-level average.

^vThis is the U.S. average for rural districts on the grade 4 and grade 8 NAEP reading tests. State-level values used throughout the report are standardized values based on this U.S.-level average.

^{vi}This should be interpreted as a 2.6 *percentage point* difference. The high school graduation rate for rural districts was 89.8% and for non-rural districts was 87.6%.

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

^{viii}See <https://education.vermont.gov/vermont-schools/school-governance/act-46-state-board-final-plan#:~:text=206%20districts%20in%20185%20towns,of%20July%201%2C%202019> for an overview of the legislation and its impacts.

^{ix}The majority of this report is conducted at the district level, and so school inclusion or exclusion is based on the NCES locale classification of the entire district.

^xIn the Common Core of Data, race and ethnicity are divided into seven categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black or African American, White, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Two or More Races. Although there are several problems with how these categories are divided and overlap, we maintain their use for a rough measure of racial diversity in our diversity index.

^{xi}Documentation and further explanation about the School Neighborhood Poverty index can be accessed on the National Center for Education Statistics’ website: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/NeighborhoodPoverty>

^{xii}This indicator is not adjusted for geographic cost, which is significant in the case of Alaska. However, the teacher salary indicator is adjusted by the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers.

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

^{xiv}See <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2043> for summary and links to a Charleston Gazette series on school consolidation that won the 2002 Education Writers Association award.

^{xv}See, for example, Jimerson’s (2006) synthesis on the opportunities afforded by small school size (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED497985>). Gershenson and Langbein (2015) found no overall effect based on school size but did find that larger schools were particularly disadvantageous for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and students with learning disabilities.

^{xvi}See, for example, Bickel & Howley’s (2000) study of school and district size in Georgia (<https://epaa.asu.edu/index.php/epaa/article/view/413>).

^{xvii}Vermont’s ratio of \$15.30 is dramatically higher than all other states (Alaska is second highest at \$4.14). The extreme value is most possibly an artifact of the way data is reported relative to Vermont’s state funding system, but other data and analyses suggest that state arguably has the most equitable system of school funding in the United States (thus, although the value might be exaggerated, the ranking is most likely correct). See <https://publicassets.org/library/publications/reports/20-years-ago-act-60-fundamentally-changed-the-way-vermont-pays-for-public-education/> for an overview of Vermont’s state education funding model.

^{xviii}Documentation and further explanation about the Comparable Wage Index For Teachers (CWIFT) can be accessed on the National Center for Education Statistics’ website: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/TeacherWage>

^{xix}U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), *2022 Assessments*.

^{xx}In other words, students from all 12 of the NCES locale district types.

^{xxi}It may also impact economic stability measures as well given that families’ ability to apply for jobs or public support may require internet access.

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

- ^{xxiii}Although it is likely that student data was reported according to gender expression-focused categories of girl/woman and boy/man, the dataset uses language that refers to biological sex (i.e., male/female). It is also worth noting that schools were not given the option of submitting data on students identifying as non-binary.
- ^{xxiv}U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), *2022 Assessments*.
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- ^{xxvii}Kaffenberger, M. (2021). Modelling the long-run learning impact of the Covid-19 learning shock: Actions to (more than) mitigate loss. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 81, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102326>
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- ^{xxxv}Halloran et al., 2021, p. 2.
- ^{xxxvi}Ansorger, 2021, p. 12.
- ^{xxxvii}Hartman, S.L. (2021). Identifying risks to the well-being of rural young children and families. The State Education Standard, 21(1), 33-37. https://nasbe.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/2021/01/Hartman_Jan-2021-Standard.pdf
- ^{xxxiii}Ansorger, 2021, p. 11.
- ^{xxxix}NCES, 2022, p. 1.
- ^xNational Center for Educational Statistics. (2022, March 3, p. 2). *U.S. Schools Report Increased Teacher Vacancies Due to COVID-19 Pandemic, New NCES Data Show*. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/3_3_2022.asp
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- ^{xii}Hartman, 2021, p. 34
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- ^{lxxxviii}Although most of the data were taken from the 2021-22, the NCES locale codes for 2021-22 were not available at the time of the data analysis. Instead, the locale codes from 2020-21 were used to determine which districts were rural.

Follow-up

to Why Rural Matters 2023

One noteworthy indicator that has been a staple of *Why Rural Matters* (WRM) since the addition of the diversity gauge in 2005 has been the percent of English Learners/Multilingual Learners in rural districts. Unfortunately, questions about missing values in one of our primary data sources (NCES Common Core of Data) prevented us from including it in *WRM 2018-19* and *WRM 2023*. Although research on these populations is more important than ever, presenting inferences and conclusions based on incomplete data could have been inaccurate and potentially misleading. However, early in the 2023 report's launch process, the research team learned of a viable alternate website for accessing these data (ED Data Express). Drawing on that source, the table below includes the most recent available (SY 2021-2022) data describing the number and percent of English Learners/Multilingual Learners in rural school districts. We hope readers will use this as a starting point for discussion, research, advocacy, and policy initiatives that focus on rural EL/ML students and families, particularly given the continuing and accelerating growth of this population. In 2013-2014, rural school districts enrolled 251,000 rural EL/ML students (3.5% of all students in rural school districts); in 2016-2017, that enrollment increased to 283,000 (3.8%); and as of 2021-2022, enrollment increased again to 330,000 (4.5%).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, ED Data Express, Public School Universe, 2021-2022. Locale codes based on 2020-2021 school year from the National Center for Education Statistics. Numbers shown above reflect enrollment counts from ED Data Express's category "EL Enrolled" in LEA types 1 (regular local school district) and 2 (component district that is part of a supervisory union).

Data Notes:

**Hawaii operates as a single school district, so data cannot be disaggregated by locale.*

***Data on EL/ML students was not reported for local school districts (type 1 and type 2 LEAs) in Vermont. Vermont reported 256 total EL/ML students within school districts served by rural supervisory unions (type 3 LEAs).*

**TABLE A.1 Number and Percent of English Learners/
Multilingual Learners in Rural Districts**

STATE	NUMBER	PERCENT	STATE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Alabama	6,839	3.1%	Nebraska	1,171	1.5%
Alaska	4,899	19.7%	Nevada	495	6.2%
Arizona	3,445	6.8%	New Hampshire	297	0.6%
Arkansas	5,157	3.5%	New Jersey	1,365	1.8%
California	37,033	20.2%	New Mexico	11,802	26.3%
Colorado	3,552	6.9%	New York	5,036	1.8%
Connecticut	1,080	1.9%	North Carolina	33,523	7.0%
Delaware	1,268	7.4%	North Dakota	720	1.7%
Florida	4,732	2.9%	Ohio	3,805	1.1%
Georgia	24,607	5.2%	Oklahoma	5,033	2.7%
Hawaii*	0	0.0%	Oregon	1,627	3.1%
Idaho	4,132	5.5%	Pennsylvania	2,442	1.0%
Illinois	2,688	1.7%	Rhode Island	67	0.7%
Indiana	6,383	2.7%	South Carolina	5,407	4.4%
Iowa	3,153	1.9%	South Dakota	1,861	3.2%
Kansas	2,692	2.3%	Tennessee	4,177	1.5%
Kentucky	4,980	2.5%	Texas	92,023	11.8%
Louisiana	705	0.8%	Utah	1,685	6.6%
Maine	402	0.5%	Vermont**	0	0.0%
Maryland	1,598	2.7%	Virginia	7,186	3.2%
Massachusetts	1,221	1.7%	Washington	7,638	9.3%
Michigan	4,206	1.9%	West Virginia	605	0.6%
Minnesota	2,833	1.9%	Wisconsin	3,917	2.4%
Mississippi	5,624	2.6%	Wyoming	709	2.9%
Missouri	2,714	1.5%	United States	329,922	4.5%
Montana	1,388	2.8%			

To investigate potential relationships between EL/ML student enrollments and results reported in WRM 2023, we also conducted bivariate correlation analyses between state-level enrollment percentages and the state ranking on each of the five gauges. Results indicate that higher EL/ML enrollments are associated with

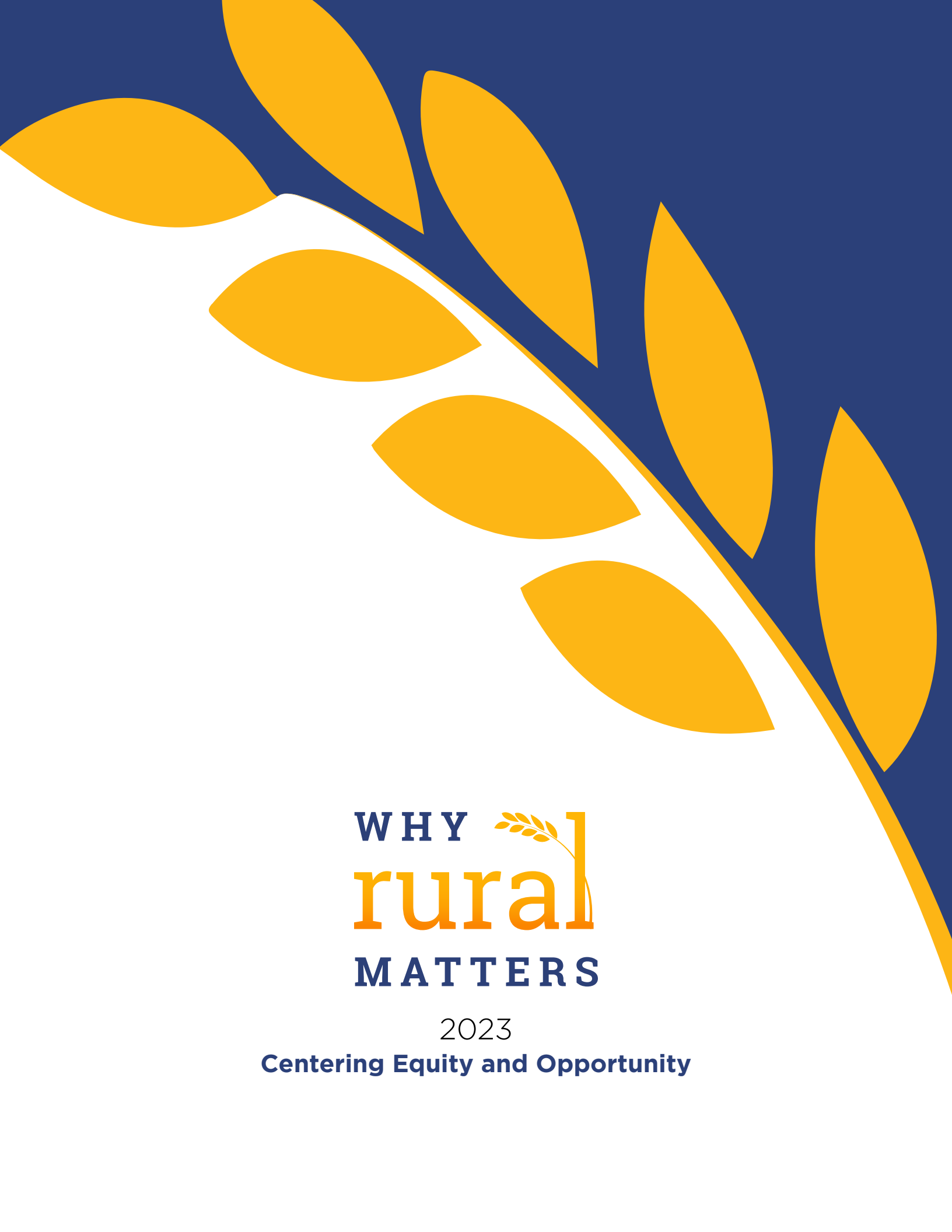
1. a lower ranking on the Importance gauge - i.e., on average, the size and scope of rural education is smaller in states with larger EL/ML enrollments ($r = 0.25$);
2. a higher ranking on the Diversity gauge - i.e., on average, rural schools have more diverse student populations in states with larger EL/ML enrollments ($r = -0.36$);
3. a lower ranking on the Policy gauge - i.e., on average, the rural education policy context is less concerning in states with larger EL/ML enrollments ($r = 0.24$);
4. a higher ranking on the Educational Outcomes gauge—i.e., on average, academic outcomes (both overall achievement levels and equity in the distribution of achievement) are lower in states with larger EL/ML enrollments ($r = -0.37$); and
5. a higher ranking on the Access to Supports gauge—i.e., on average, access to supports for learning and development is more limited in states with larger EL/ML enrollments ($r = -0.31$).

Using traditional ranges for interpreting strength of association, two of the gauges show a weak relationship with EL/ML enrollment (Importance gauge and Policy gauge); the other three show a moderate relationship with EL/ML enrollment (Diversity gauge, Educational Outcomes gauge, and Access to Supports gauge).

As elsewhere in the report, we caution here against over-interpretation of results to either infer causation or make assumptions that rural education (and, in this instance, rural EL/ML education) is not deserving of greater attention from policymakers. A key objective of the report, here and elsewhere, is not to offer definitive answers but rather to identify issues and opportunities that merit focused attention and targeted research.

Notes





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