

HIGHLIGHTS

In 2006, NCES released a new classification system to make the reporting of locale data consistent across its various surveys and to be more precise in its classification of rural areas. This report brings together data from NCES and Census surveys and applies the new classification system to create a series of indicators on the status of education in rural America. The data used in these indicators are drawn from the most recent versions of NCES's Common Core of Data (CCD), Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), and Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). Additional information on the methodology and the datasets used in this report can be found in appendix B. More detailed information on the new NCES urban-centric locale classification system can be found in the section "Measuring Rural Education."

The main findings of this report are summarized below, by chapter:

Demographics

- In 2003–04, over half of all operating school districts and one-third of all public schools were in rural areas; yet only one-fifth of all

public school students were enrolled in rural schools. (*Indicator 1.1*)

- In 2003–04, a larger percentage of public school students in rural areas (10 percent) attended very small schools (schools with fewer than 200 students) than public school students in towns (3 percent), suburbs (1 percent), or cities (1 percent). (*Indicator 1.2*)
- The percentage of White public school students in rural areas was larger than that in any other locale. The same was true for American Indian/Alaska Native public school students. However, the percentages of public school students in rural areas who were Black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander were smaller than those in any other locale. (*Indicator 1.3*)
- A larger percentage of public school students in the South and the Midwest were enrolled in rural schools (28 and 25 percent, respectively) than in the Northeast and the West (16 and 13 percent, respectively) in 2003–04. (*Indicator 1.4*)
- In 2005, about 50 percent of children in rural areas between the ages of 3 and 5 at-

- tended a center-based preprimary program, such as a daycare center, Head Start program, preschool, nursery school, or prekindergarten. This was less than the national rate (57 percent). (*Indicator 1.5*)
- In 2003–04, about 6 percent of rural students were enrolled in private schools, which was less than the national rate (11 percent). (*Indicator 1.6*)
 - In 2004, the percentage of children living in poverty or below 185 percent of the poverty threshold in rural areas (35 percent) was smaller than that in towns (46 percent) or cities (47 percent), but larger than that in suburban areas (28 percent). (*Indicator 1.7*)
 - Rural public schools overall had a smaller percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in 2003–04 (38 percent) than public schools in cities and towns (53 and 43 percent, respectively). The percentage of public school students in rural remote areas attending a moderate-to-high poverty school (45 percent) was higher than the percentages in all other locales except large and midsize cities (66 and 49 percent). (*Indicator 1.8*)
 - In 2003–04, larger percentages of Black and American Indian/Alaska Native public school students in remote rural areas attended moderate-to-high poverty schools (87 and 79 percent, respectively) than in large cities (78 and 62 percent, respectively). (*Indicator 1.9*)
 - A smaller percentage of public school students in rural areas were identified as limited English proficient (LEP) than in any other locale in 2003–04 (2 vs. 5–14 percent). (*Indicator 1.10*)
 - There was little variation between the percentage of public school students with an Individual Education Program (IEP) in rural areas (13 percent) and the percentages in other locales (12–14 percent) in 2003–04. (*Indicator 1.11*)
 - In 2003, greater percentages of students in rural areas than students in cities had parents who attended a school event (74 vs. 65 percent) or served as a volunteer or on a committee (42 vs. 38 percent). In addition, a larger percentage of students in rural areas had parents who reported taking their children to an athletic event outside of school than students in cities and suburbs (42 vs. 34 and 38 percent, respectively). (*Indicators 1.12 and 1.13*)
 - In 2004, the percentages of school-age children in rural areas with a mother or father whose highest educational attainment was a high school diploma (33 and 36 percent, respectively) were higher than the comparable percentages for children in cities (26 and 24 percent, respectively) and suburbs (25 and 24 percent respectively). (*Indicator 1.14*)
 - In all locales a larger percentage of high school students in 2003 had parents who expected their child's highest educational attainment to be a bachelor's degree than any other level of attainment. The percentage of rural students whose parents expected their highest educational attainment to be less than a bachelor's degree (42 percent) was larger than the percentages of students in cities and suburban areas (30 and 25 percent, respectively). (*Indicator 1.15*)

Outcomes

- A larger percentage of rural public school students in the 4th- and 8th-grades in 2005 scored at or above the *Proficient* level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading, mathematics, and science assessments than did public school students in cities at these grade levels. However, smaller percentages of rural public school students than suburban public school students scored at or above the *Proficient* level in reading and mathematics. (*Indicators 2.1–2.3*)
- In 2004, the high school status dropout rate among 16- to 24-year-olds in rural areas (11 percent) was higher than in suburban areas (9 percent), but lower than in cities (13 percent). (*Indicator 2.4*)
- The *averaged freshman graduation rate* for public high school students was higher during the 2002–03 school year in rural areas (75 percent) than in cities (65 percent), but lower than in towns and suburban areas (76 and 79 percent, respectively). (*Indicator 2.5*)

- A larger percentage of teenagers in rural areas than in suburban areas were neither enrolled in school nor employed in 2004 (6 vs. 4 percent). (*Indicator 2.6*)
- College enrollment rates for both 18- to 24-year olds and 25- to 29-year olds were generally lower in rural areas than in all other locales in 2004. (*Indicator 2.7*)
- A smaller percentage of rural adults than suburban adults in 2005 took work-related courses (24 vs. 30 percent) or courses for personal interest (18 vs. 23 percent), and a smaller percentage of rural adults than adults in cities and suburban areas participated in part-time college or university credential programs (3 vs. 6 percent each). (*Indicator 2.8*)
- The percentage of adults with a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational attainment in 2004 was lower in rural areas (13 percent) than the national percentage (17 percent). (*Indicator 2.9*)
- Regardless of educational attainment, persons in rural areas generally had higher median earnings in 2004 than those in cities and towns (when adjusted to reflect regional cost differences), but lower median earnings than those in suburban areas. (*Indicator 2.10*)
- The unemployment rate for adults ages 25 to 34 was lower in rural areas (6.7 percent) than in cities (8.0 percent) and towns (8.3 percent), and the unemployment rate for adults ages 35 to 64 was lower in rural areas (4.5 percent) than in all other locales (4.8–6.4 percent). (*Indicator 2.11*)
- In rural areas, as well as nationally, a larger percentage of public schools reported being underenrolled (69 percent of rural schools) than overenrolled (13 percent of rural schools) in fall 2005. The percentage of public schools reporting severe underenrollment in rural areas (33 percent) was greater than in all other locales (12–18 percent). (*Indicator 3.3*)
- In 2002–03, the percentage of public high school students attending schools offering dual credit courses was similar in rural areas (76 percent) to the percentages in cities and suburbs, while the percentage of public high school students attending schools offering Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses or programs was lower in rural areas (69 and 1 percent, respectively) than in cities (93 and 8 percent) and suburbs (96 and 7 percent). (*Indicator 3.4*)
- The number of public school students per instructional computer with Internet access in school was lower in rural areas (3.0 to 1) in 2005 than in suburban (4.3 to 1) and city (4.2 to 1) schools. (*Indicator 3.5*)
- Rural public schools generally had fewer pupils per teacher (15.3) than public schools in other locales (15.9–16.9) in 2003–04. (*Indicator 3.6*)
- Racial/ethnic minorities account for a smaller percentage of public school teachers in rural schools (8 percent) than in schools in all other locales (12–29 percent) in 2003–04. (*Indicator 3.7*)
- In 2003–04, teachers in rural public schools averaged more years of experience (14.5 years) than teachers in city public schools (13.6 years). (*Indicator 3.8*)

Resources for public schools

- Rural public schools tended to receive a smaller percentage of their revenues in 2003–04 from federal sources (9 percent) than city public schools (11 percent), but a larger percentage than suburban public schools (6 percent). (*Indicator 3.1*)
- Adjusted current public school expenditures per student were higher in rural areas in 2003–04 (\$8,400) than in cities (\$8,100), suburbs (\$7,900 each), and towns (\$8,400). (*Indicator 3.2*)
- In general, smaller percentages of public school teachers in rural areas than across the nation as a whole reported problems as “serious” and behavioral problems as frequent (occurring at least once a week) in their schools in 2003–04. (*Indicator 3.9*)
- Generally, a larger percentage of public school teachers in rural areas than in other locales reported being satisfied with the teaching conditions in their school in 2003–04, though a smaller percentage of

rural public school teachers than suburban public school teachers reported being satisfied with their salary. (*Indicator 3.9*)

- Public school teachers in rural areas earned less (\$43,000), on average, in 2003–04 than their peers in towns (\$45,900), suburbs (\$45,700), and cities (\$44,000), even after adjusting for geographic cost differences. (*Indicator 3.10*)
- In 2003–04, public schools in rural areas experienced the greatest difficulty filling teacher vacancies in the fields of English as a

second language (ESL) and foreign languages. Apart from these fields, the percentage of public schools in rural areas that reportedly could not fill teacher vacancies was not measurably different from the percentages in other locales. (*Indicator 3.11*)

- In public schools, the average number of students per counselor, social worker, school psychologist, and special education instructional aide was lower in rural areas in 2003–04 than in cities at both the elementary and secondary levels. (*Indicator 3.12*)