

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR RURAL STUDENTS

November 2017



INTRODUCTION

Many children and their families in rural America need better and more equitable educational opportunities. This is the main theme of *Why Rural Matters 2015-16: Understanding the Changing Landscape*, the eighth biennial report by the Rural School and Community Trust and its partners on the condition of rural education in the 50 states. The challenges students face in many rural places are staggering. Limited access to advanced coursework, medical care, food and employment opportunities, continue to daunt students in many rural communities. Poverty rates are also climbing. In 23 states a majority of rural students are in low-income households; this is a noticeable uptick from 2013 when only 16 states had a majority of rural students who were from low-income families.

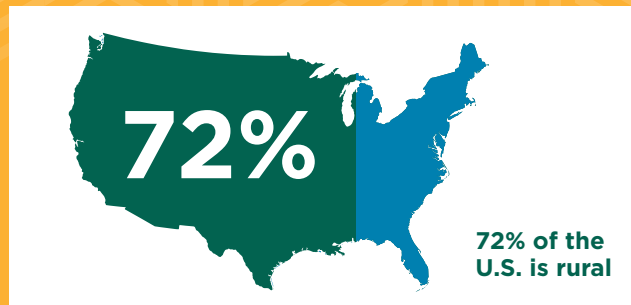
Who are the children attending our nation's rural schools and what federal policies and resource recommendations will provide and support a framework for their success in learning and life? Hancock County School District, deep in the mountains of rural northeastern Tennessee, is an instructive example. Remote and poor, yet rich in culture, history, and natural beauty, Hancock County has the highest rate of unemployment of any county in Tennessee and the lowest percentage of individuals moving to post-secondary education. Currently, only 25 percent of third-graders are reading at grade level. The low literacy rate is a major cause of the perpetually high rates of unemployment and low levels of educational attainment. However, with the support of local business and community leaders, nonprofit partners, and state and federal resources, these students, families, and the school district are implementing a literacy community-based initiative with the goal to provide every student with a high-quality education, pathway to high school graduation, and multiple post-secondary choices leading to a fulfilling career, home life, and civic participation.

Leveling the Playing Field highlights the many and varied opportunities for Congress to act to ensure rural students like those in Hancock County receive the education they need and are given an equitable chance to succeed. In fact, we believe adopting the following policy initiatives will only support the work already underway in communities like Hancock County:

- Enabling Access to New, High-Quality Educational Opportunities
- Addressing Health Barriers to Learning
- Leveraging Career and Technical Education Programs for Economic Growth
- Ending Food Insecurity for Rural Children
- Adequately Investing in Rural Schools

It is critical that Congress act quickly to ensure that the one in six students who live in rural America are given a fairer opportunity to succeed.

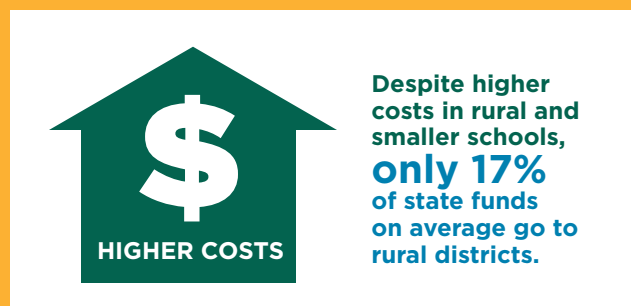
Rural Children in our K-12 Schools: A SNAPSHOT



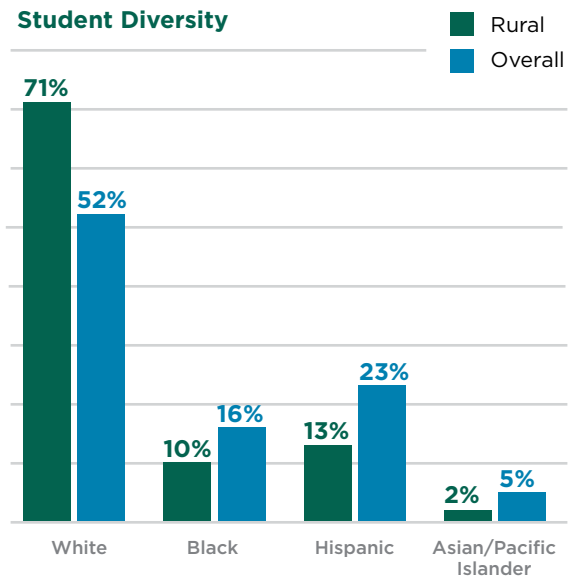
Nearly 1 in 5 U.S. students attend a rural school.



53% of school districts in the U.S. are rural.



Student Diversity



The United States is largely a rural country; in fact, 72 percent of the country's landmass is rural! Similarly, the majority (53 percent) of school districts throughout the country are rural. More than one in four of America's public schools (27.7 percent²) are rural. Despite higher costs for some services in rural and smaller schools, only 17 percent of state education funding on average goes to rural districts.

Many rural school districts and communities face unique opportunities and serious obstacles in providing rich, equitable educational opportunities for their students. Issues that matter in urban communities can resonate even more deeply in rural America (including healthcare access), while other issues most impact rural areas only—such as

the presence of federal lands limiting the available local property tax base. Despite these opportunities and obstacles, America's rural school districts play a critical role in helping ensure all our nation's rural students graduate high school prepared for college and the workforce.

Rural students are, on average, less diverse than students in other types of school districts. In rural schools, 71 percent of students are White, compared to 52 percent overall in the U.S. Similarly, only 10 percent of rural students are Black, 13 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, compared to 16 percent Black, 23 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander nationwide. However, a higher percentage of rural students are American Indian and Alaska Native

Rural Children in our K-12 Schools: A SNAPSHOT



Nearly
8.9 million
students
attend
rural schools

That is more than the enrollments of:

New
York
City

+

Los
Angeles

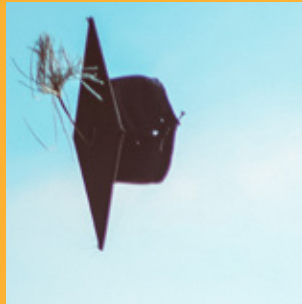
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Chicago

+

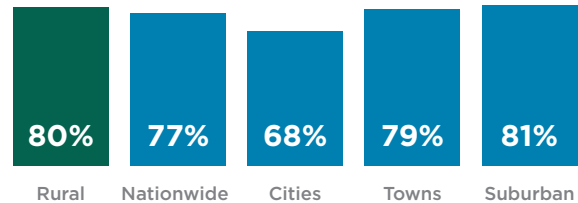
And incredibly,
the nation's
next 75 largest
school districts
combined

More than one in
four rural students
is a child of color.



Graduation Rates

2008-09 school year



(2 percent) compared to those in cities and suburbs (1 percent).

Rural children face greater levels of poverty than their peers. In 2015, child poverty rates were 24 percent in non-metro areas and 20 percent in metro areas.³ Related to this poverty and lower enrollment levels, rural schools operate with very low funding levels. Rural districts receive much less federal Title I funding per poor pupil than urban districts. On top of the limited investment, rural school districts tend to be geographically large, adding increased costs for buses, technology, and adding to staffing challenges.⁴

Despite the challenges of poverty, funding and distance, rural students perform well academically overall. In 2013, rural students performed better than students living in towns and cities on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 4th and 8th grade reading and math.⁵

Rural schools also graduate more of their students than schools in cities or towns. In the 2008-09 school year, rural schools graduated 80 percent of their students, compared with 77 percent nationwide, 68 percent in cities and 79 percent in towns. Suburban students only graduated at slightly higher rates (81 percent).⁶

% At or Above Proficient	Rural	Town	Suburb	City
4th Grade Reading	35.6	30.5	39.6	29.6
4th Grade Math	39.7	35.3	44.0	34.5
8th Grade Reading	32.2	28.8	37.5	27.7
8th Grade Math	31.4	27.8	36.6	28.1

PART I

ENABLING ACCESS TO NEW, HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

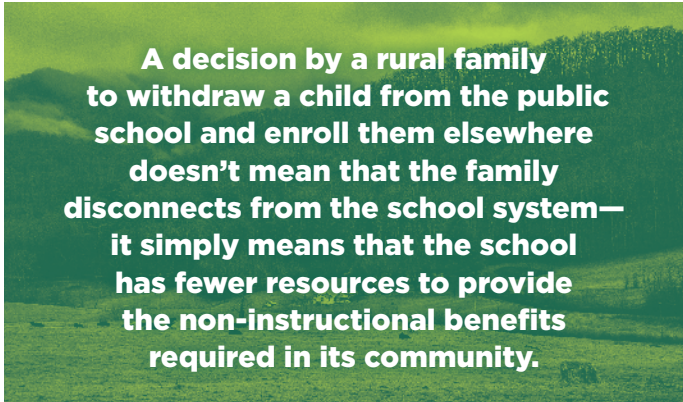
School choice is a term that is frequently used to promote the privatization of public education funding. School choice proponents argue that competition for funding will force traditional public schools to increase their academic rigor to retain students in their school system. They also claim that students should not be required to attend school districts that may not be providing them with high quality educational opportunities. Policymakers in rural areas are often split between wanting to support the notion of more “school choice,” but not knowing how to provide choices to their constituents in small or sparsely populated areas. The problem for rural students and families who are dissatisfied with the offerings in their public school and want more choices is that they often have no other available public or private school in their area. So, how can the demand for better and greater educational choices in rural schools be addressed?

The answer is not to divert federal or state funds to help pay the tuition for private schools. Transportation to and from private schools is an enormous barrier for rural families regardless of their income level.⁵ Distances between schools and communities make finding an alternative to the public-school system a logistical impossibility for many students and families as well. The 2011-12 federal Schools and Staffing Survey indicated that 74 percent of students in urban schools had the option of enrolling in another nearby school, but only 21 percent of rural students had that same ability. That percentage is even smaller for most students in remote rural areas.

For rural states like Montana, adequately financing the public schools is already difficult. Even charter schools, which are financed by taxpayers, have yet to flourish in many rural areas and may never expand in large numbers because of the relatively low number of students. And, vouchers are especially harmful to the public school systems serving large rural areas because the schools are forced to spread the same costs for facilities, transportation, administration, and instruction over a smaller stream of revenue. Because of their small enrollments, rural schools encounter diseconomies of scale.⁶ If enrollment for rural schools declines further, it will only increase the challenge of providing federally mandated programs for students in special education, English-language instruction, and ensuring students have access to well-qualified teachers and a strong curriculum.

Another reason vouchers would either harm or simply be inapplicable to rural communities is that rural and small-town public schools do more than just educate children. They serve a critical social and economic function as the primary employer of small communities; they may offer health care or medical referrals for children and adults, and they frequently offer food pantries, breakfast and lunch programs—and are the location of many other community activities. A decision by a rural family to withdraw a child from the public school and enroll them elsewhere doesn’t mean that the family disconnects from the school system—it simply means that the school has fewer resources to provide the non-instructional benefits required in its community.

Finally, school vouchers are unlikely to provide rural students and families with high-quality educational options. Evidence that students who use vouchers to attend a private school fare better academically than their public school counterparts is mixed at best. Recent studies of the Louisiana,⁷ Indiana,⁸ Ohio,⁹ and the District of Columbia¹⁰ voucher programs reveal that students who used vouchers performed worse academically than their peers. In addition, studies of long-standing voucher programs in Milwaukee¹¹ and Cleveland¹² found that students who used vouchers to attend private schools showed no improvement in reading or math compared with students not in the program.



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Instead of promoting vouchers, Congress should turn its attention to increasing school choice options for rural students by enhancing access to educational technology in their public-school systems. The answer seems simplistic, but requires policymakers to address many complicated and interrelated policy and funding areas. Deploying education technology that can bridge distances between high-level content, instruction and professional development and personalize educational opportunities for children is a game-changer for rural school districts. Researchers have found that when students in rural public schools have improved access to new technologies and teachers who know how to use them, academic performance on math and science tests scores can increase.¹³ But 1 in 5 rural districts still can’t

access the fiber-optic cables that are bringing high-speed Internet to schools elsewhere.¹⁴

One of the key actions Congress and the Administration could take to improve educational options for rural children in public schools is to expand and support the E-Rate program, which provides \$3.9 billion in funding annually to support K12 school connectivity. The program has transformed access to internet connectivity in the nation's classrooms¹⁵ by making internet access more affordable for public schools and libraries. Created by Congress in 1996, the E-Rate program provides districts with discounted internet connectivity. Prior to E-Rate, few public schools and libraries had sufficient resources to keep pace with ever changing technology and connectivity demands. And while technology continues to change and demand continues to grow, the E-Rate program has evolved to help public school districts bring new technologies and high-speed connectivity to more schools and libraries nationwide.

The transformative power of E-Rate is perhaps most notable in rural communities. Prior to E-Rate, the geographic isolation and small populations in many of these communities were severely underserved by affordable broadband access. This one-two combination left some communities with only one internet provider, leading to monopoly-like behavior by some utilities and high costs for schools, libraries and families. Most often, rural schools and libraries were forced to use the only affordable option, which meant very slow and unreliable internet service. The 2014 modernization of E-Rate—which included programmatic changes to better tailor the program to support affordable access to high-speed broadband and an increase in the program funding cap—bolstered connectivity even further for rural communities, by incentivizing competition and providing supports for both broadband and internal connections.

Recent data from Education SuperHighway¹⁶ benchmarks the progress toward connectivity:

- 39.2 million students meet the minimum connectivity goal of 100 kbps per student, meaning that 75% of all students in America are connected to high-speed broadband
- 97% of schools are connected by fiber and 88% of schools report having sufficient Wi-Fi in their classrooms
- An additional 35.2 million students gained access to the broadband they need for digital learning in the last four years
- 22% of school districts now meet the FCC's 1 Mbps per student long-term goal
- 6.5 million students don't have affordable Internet access

In 2013, only 30% of school districts could offer internet connections at a federal target rate of 100 kilobits per second per student, while in early 2016, 77% of schools met that target.
—FAST COMPANY

The impacts of the 2014 E-Rate modernization are clear: Education Superhighway found that in 2013, only 30 percent of school districts could offer internet connections at a federal target rate of 100 kilobits per second per student, while in early 2017, 94 percent of schools met that target.¹⁷

What does improved access to affordable broadband mean for students in rural communities seeking new and better educational options? It means more equitable access to advanced coursework, more equitable access to high-quality instruction and more equitable educational outcomes for students. For example, in Colorado,¹⁸ three rural school districts located within 30 miles of each other collaborated to offer more AP courses for students. They rearranged their schedules and created video conference classrooms that tripled the amount of AP classes offered to students. Other rural school districts rely on E-Rate to partner with local community colleges to offer dual-enrollment opportunities for students, which leads to better grades in high school, increased enrollment in college following high school, higher rates of persistence in college, greater credit accumulation, and increased rates of credential attainment.¹⁹

■ Steps Congress Can Take to Enable Access to New, High-Quality Educational Opportunities

- Stop pushing private school voucher policy as a means for addressing educational inequities in rural communities.
- Protect the 2014 policy changes to the E-Rate program.
- Increase funding for Title IV of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This program—which was intended to support technology and professional development related to technology integration in teaching and learning—was undermined by subsequent appropriations, which funded the program well below the authorized amount.

PART II

ADDRESSING HEALTH BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Children cannot learn to their fullest potential with unmet health needs, but access to health care providers and health insurance can be difficult for children in rural communities. A 2014 report by First Focus found that 45 of the 50 counties in the U.S. with the highest rates of uninsured children are in rural areas.²⁰ Fortunately, thanks to two key federal programs, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), more children in rural communities are gaining healthcare coverage. From 2009 to 2015, the uninsured rate for children in small towns and rural areas declined by 3 percentage points nationally.²¹

Children in rural areas are 24 percent more likely than those in urban areas to rely on CHIP and Medicaid for health care.²² One of the reasons is because the overall poverty rates are higher for rural children, and the types of jobs there, such as agriculture or small businesses, are less likely to offer insurance.²³ Further, seasonal workers or those with cyclical employment are more likely to live in rural areas and also unlikely to have insurance.²⁴ This means accessing insurance through a parent's employer is not a reality for many children in rural America.

While a sufficient supply of healthcare providers available to children in rural areas is another obstacle to help students prepare for school,²⁵ there are other issues that impede rural children's access to healthcare. The inability of families to find transportation to and from the provider's office; costs associated with paying for healthcare services, medications or treatment; and language or communication barriers and privacy

concerns can also limit parents' ability to address children's healthcare needs.²⁶

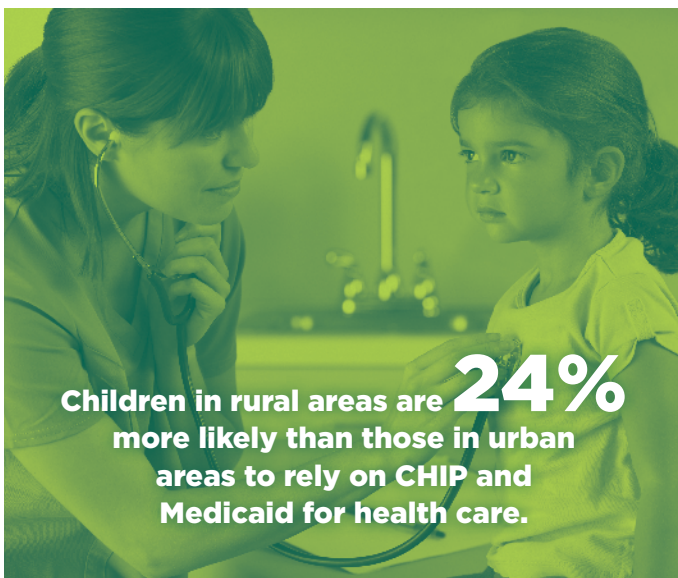
These barriers, coupled with rural children's high eligibility for federally supported healthcare services, means that some rural schools must be the ones to regularly deliver critical health services to students. Rural schools often rely on Medicaid and CHIP funding to hire healthcare providers like school nurses, purchase medical supplies and equipment, and diagnose, screen and treat children's ailments. Rural school districts also assist families in enrolling in CHIP and Medicaid, so they can qualify for healthcare.²⁷

While children in rural areas are more reliant on schools for healthcare than their peers, rural schools are more likely to lack nurses to meet the various medical needs students have. Twenty-four percent of rural schools have no nurse compared to 10 percent of urban schools.²⁸ While school based Medicaid funding can be used to ameliorate the shortage of school nurses, rural districts are less likely to bill Medicaid for school nurses than other districts. Only 32 percent of rural schools bill Medicaid for school nurses compared to 52 percent of urban districts. This is mainly due to the enormous administrative challenges that come with billing Medicaid that make it more difficult for rural districts to participate in school-based Medicaid reimbursement systems.

Of particular importance to communities in rural areas is the ability of rural children to access the mental health and substance abuse treatment they need. Nationally, seven out of 10 students receiving mental health services find these services at school. But with chronic shortages of mental health professionals in rural areas,²⁹ many children and families cannot access these providers anywhere else.

■ Steps Congress Can Take to Address Health Barriers to Learning

- Extend funding for CHIP for five years at current funding levels.
- End efforts to cap Medicaid funding as this would limit the reimbursement schools receive for providing critical healthcare services to Medicaid/CHIP beneficiaries.
- Work with CMS to find ways to reduce the administrative burden on districts that rely on Medicaid to fund critical health personnel in school, which will enable rural districts greater access to school-based Medicaid reimbursement for these positions.



PART III

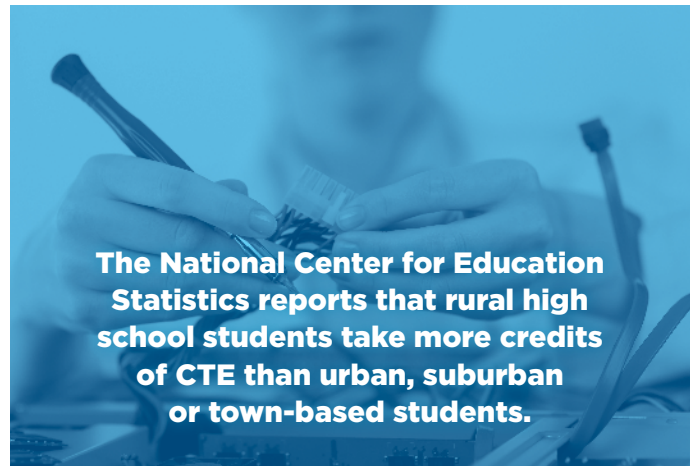
LEVERAGING CTE PROGRAMS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

Career and technical education programs (CTE) are an important tool that enable rural students to enter high-wage, high-skilled and high-demand careers. CTE programs at the secondary and post-secondary level provide rural students with the skills and training to meet the needs of high-growth industries such as renewable energy, computer science, and healthcare. And rural school districts and communities clearly understand the value of increasing high-quality, in-demand CTE program offerings. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that rural high school students take more credits of CTE than urban, suburban or town-based students. In particular, STEM-focused CTE programs can pave the way for “rural communities to reimagine themselves and to allow rural students to find meaningful and challenging work in the communities they love.”³⁰

Nationally, students who participate in CTE programs are more motivated and engaged with their coursework because of its connection to the real world and, as a result, less likely to dropout. This is particularly important for rural students who are less likely to enroll in college and may lack role models who have earned a valuable credential.

But there are unique challenges in providing rural students with rigorous, relevant career and technical education programs. Small populations of students that are geographically dispersed make it difficult and expensive to house CTE programs or transport students to and from them. It is also more difficult to find qualified teachers to teach specific courses or to offer enough courses to meet the varied interest of students.³¹ CTE teacher shortages are also prevalent in rural areas: In 2016, two-thirds of states reported a shortage of rural CTE teachers in at least one specialty.³²

It can also be difficult for rural schools to provide students with a range of career exploration and work-based learning experiences, as many rural areas have only a few employers or industries.³³ To ensure students are learning on appropriate software and equipment and in adequate facilities, CTE programs require substantial upkeep. Limited local, state and federal funding makes it challenging for rural districts to maintain these programs so that a student does not need re-training when entering the workplace. Small rural districts also face challenges in finding higher-education partners to ensure students can follow a career pathway toward a degree or credential. Finally, it is challenging for rural districts to access workforce data to know whether their



CTE program offerings are relevant to regional or state-wide economic trends.

In speaking with superintendents in rural school districts, AASA has found a noticeable decline in the number of school leaders who opt to apply for federal CTE funds through the Perkins CTE Act. These school leaders indicate that the heavy administrative burden associated with the Perkins funds encourages them to decline the funding. These rural school leaders tell us that their tiny federal allocations do not justify the amount of compliance-related data collection and reporting required.

■ Steps Congress Can Take to Leverage CTE Programs for Economic Growth

- Pass the *Strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) for the 21st Century Act* in the Senate.
 - This bill would lessen paperwork for rural school districts by allowing administrators to fill out a simple, easy-to-complete local application.
 - This legislation also allows districts to target dollars for CTE teacher recruitment and retention, professional development and updating equipment and technology.
 - This bill requires collaboration between secondary and post-secondary CTE program, which will provide leverage for rural school systems seeking to partner with higher education institutions.
 - The bill enables states to access comprehensive, up-to-date labor market information that can be shared with districts to inform their CTE programs and to ensure their courses match with workforce needs.
- Invest in the Perkins program. From FY 2007 to 2017, total Perkins grant funding to states dropped by 13 percent—cutting nearly \$170 million from federal support of CTE.

PART IV

ENDING FOOD INSECURITY FOR RURAL CHILDREN

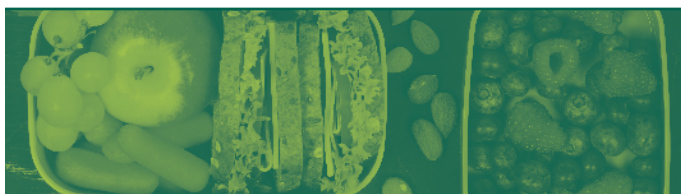
Children in rural areas are more likely than other children to live in poverty; about one-quarter of children in rural areas were poor in 2015, compared to about one-fifth of urban children.³⁴ Because of this, rural families rely more heavily on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. According to the Center for Rural Affairs, 14.6 percent of rural households receive SNAP benefits, compared to 10.9 percent of urban households.³⁵ Federal data show that rural SNAP participation rates—those eligible for SNAP benefits and receiving them—are significantly greater than urban participation rates. Nearly 86 percent of eligible rural residents receive SNAP benefits compared to nearly 73 percent of eligible urban residents.³⁶

Children living in rural areas are also more likely than urban children to be overweight or obese. More than one-third of children ages 10 to 17 in both large and small rural areas met the criteria for overweight or obesity (having a body mass index at or above the 85th percentile for their age and sex), compared to 30.1 percent of urban children.

Similarly, large numbers of rural students face food insecurity. For many rural families, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs in rural schools are critical services. But because rural schools serve fewer students than urban and suburban schools and because of the distance required for delivery, many rural schools have difficulty funding these programs. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows schools and districts serving large percentages of students in poverty, allows schools to take part in larger economies of scale and to feed all students nutritious meals.

■ Steps Congress Can Take to End Food Insecurity for Rural Children

- Preserve rural children's access to food by continuing to offer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to families in need.
- Maintain or expand the Community Eligibility Provision's eligibility threshold, which enables high-poverty rural schools the opportunity to feed all students healthy breakfast and lunches.



PART V

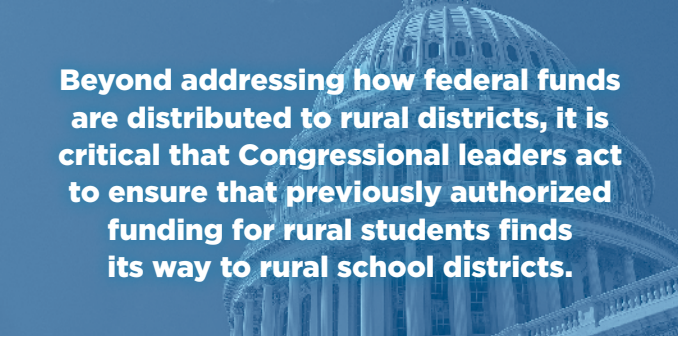
ADEQUATELY INVESTING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

When it comes to public education, investment matters, but money is not a silver bullet. To the contrary, money alone will not provide the educational opportunity to ensure that our nation's students—including our rural students—graduate from high school fully prepared for post-secondary opportunity. At the same time, it is a false and damaging narrative to think that money doesn't matter at all when many rural schools face serious funding inequities that impact students every day. A 2016 study from the NBER concluded definitively that "money can and does matter in education" in furthering student achievement.³⁷

Virtually all of the gaps that rural schools work to overcome with students—opportunity gap, achievement gap, graduation rate gap—correlate to poverty. Poverty—and the persistence of poverty—directly impacts the ability of children to learn, and the ability of schools to provide educational opportunities. Addressing rural students' lack of resources can be transformative in ensuring they have an equitable opportunity to succeed. Fortunately, there are many opportunities at the federal level to level the playing field for rural children and school districts to ensure they receive adequate and appropriate funding.

The first and most universal step that can be undertaken by every federal agency and by Congress is to stop allocating resources in a competitive manner. Under the Obama administration, we saw a sustained effort to direct limited federal dollars to new, competitive programs. This approach negatively and disproportionately impacts rural communities because they lack the capacity or expertise to submit applications. Competitive allocations exacerbate the resource gap between rural school districts and urban systems. Federal formula dollars must remain prioritized to federal formula flagship programs—like Title I and IDEA—that target areas of need and distribute funds equitably.

However, distributing federal resources via formula is insufficient if the funding formula penalizes rural districts. It has been well documented³⁸ that the current Title I formula allocates funding in a way that does not accurately capture the levels of student poverty in rural school districts. Specifically, the Title I formula targets federal dollars based on *number* of students in poverty rather than relying solely on the *percentage* of students in poverty. This major element of the Title I formula enables larger, but often less poor, districts to receive a higher per-pupil allocation of the federal government's



Beyond addressing how federal funds are distributed to rural districts, it is critical that Congressional leaders act to ensure that previously authorized funding for rural students finds its way to rural school districts.

largest category of spending on education. Specifically, counting the number of students in poverty negatively and disproportionately impacted small schools which tend to be rural: while their overall concentration of students in poverty could be higher, a larger, less poor district could 'max out' in the upper levels of the number weighting scale. During the 2015 reauthorization of ESEA known as the ESSA, Congress failed to adjust the number weighting bias in the formula that would have ensured districts receive their Title I allocation based on the actual presence—as opposed to the volume or appearance—of poverty. However, ESSA did require Congress to complete a comprehensive review of the Title I formulas and to report on the efficacy and efficiency of both number and percentage weighting, and the extent to which they accurately target Title I dollars based on need. This report was expected at the end of June 2017, but was unavailable as of the printing of this report.

Beyond addressing how federal funds are distributed to rural districts, it is critical that Congressional leaders act to ensure that previously authorized funding for rural students finds its way to rural school districts. The Rural Education Achievement Program and the Secure Rural Schools (Forest Counties) Program are prime examples of how Congress can and must act quickly to meet previously acknowledged resource inequities in rural communities.

The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) signaled a new partnership between the federal government and rural schools by setting up a dedicated funding stream for rural schools and granting them additional flexibility to meet federal mandates. REAP was created in 2001 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act as a unique formula program for rural districts that received very small federal allocations and need new flexibility and additional funding to meet with the law's mandates. REAP was reauthorized in ESSA and is composed of two grant programs, the Rural and Low Income Schools (RLIS) program and the Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program. REAP has helped rural districts overcome some of the challenges of geographic isolation while at the same time allowing them the ability to leverage federal funds

to increase student achievement. Over the last 15 years, schools have used REAP dollars in a variety of ways: hiring additional teachers and aides, purchasing new technology, extending course offerings for students and increasing the focus on closing the achievement gap.

The Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program began in 2000 and provides consistent and reliable funding for more than 775 rural counties and 4,400 schools located near national forests across the United States. Before the Secure Rural Schools Act, rural counties and schools automatically received 25 percent of the revenues from timber sales from our national forests. However, beginning in the 1980s, national policies that diminished the revenue-generating activity permitted in these forests led to a steep decline in timber sales and a negative fiscal impact on districts and counties heavily relying on this percentage of revenue. In response to this decline, SRS was enacted to stabilize payments to counties and to compensate for lost revenues. Congress funded SRS for 2014 and 2015, but has not funded SRS for 2016. Without these funds, there will be immediate reductions in education programs and services for students as well as fire and police, road and bridge and other critical community services.

■ Steps Congress Can Take to Adequately Invest in Rural Schools

- Ensure the U.S. Department of Education completes its report on the Title I formula, and that Congress and the Department uses that information to ensure the Title I formula is revised to accurately and more meaningfully allocate Title I dollars to areas of greatest need.
- Ensure the process by which rural districts access and receive their REAP funding remain as streamlined and efficient as possible.
- Provide retroactive SRS funding for FY 16 and FY17, and act in a bipartisan manner to reauthorize the underlying legislation to support essential safety, fire, police, road and bridge, community and education services.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of these report recommendations are shared values that families matter, communities matter, and resources matter. With Hancock County as an example, we hope our work to level the playing field for rural children will inspire other organizations to join us in our advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill. We also trust this report can enlighten policymakers about the many ways they can provide leadership and support for the rural schools and communities in their districts and states.

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