

# RURAL STUDENT POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES KEY STATS AND TRENDS

The statistics throughout this fact sheet draw from multiple sources, all using the [National Center for Education Statistics \(NCES\) definition](#) of a rural school. NCES classifies schools into four locale types: rural, town, suburban, and urban. The statistics provided reflect nationwide trends, and links are included for each individual source to allow for further exploration of specific data points.

While most of the statistics highlighted here focus on college pathways, rural students choose other post-high school options like military service or entering the workforce. However, national data on these alternatives is limited, which is why the focus here is mainly on college-going trends.

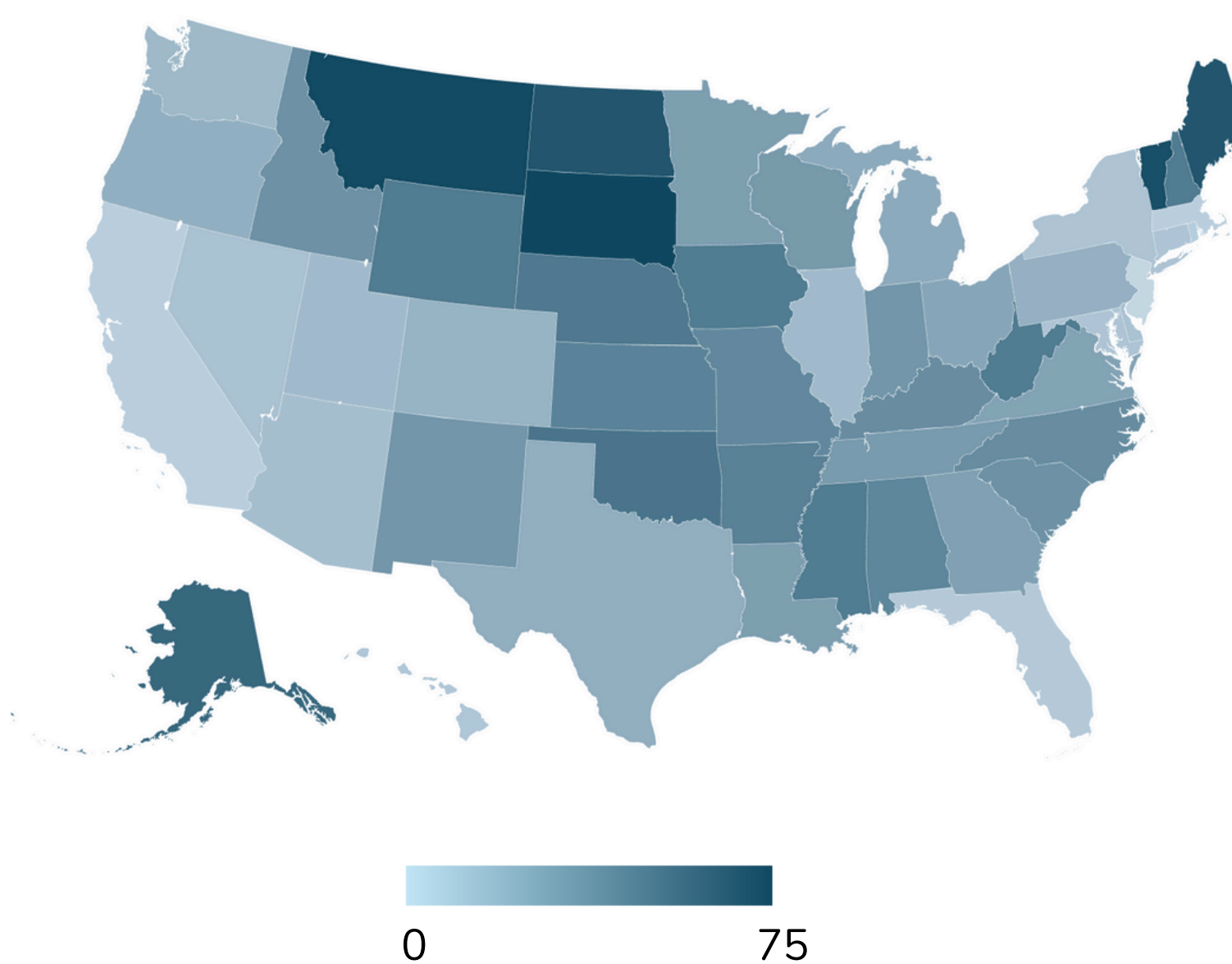
## Rural Students

**9.5 Million**  
public school students in the U.S.  
attend a rural school

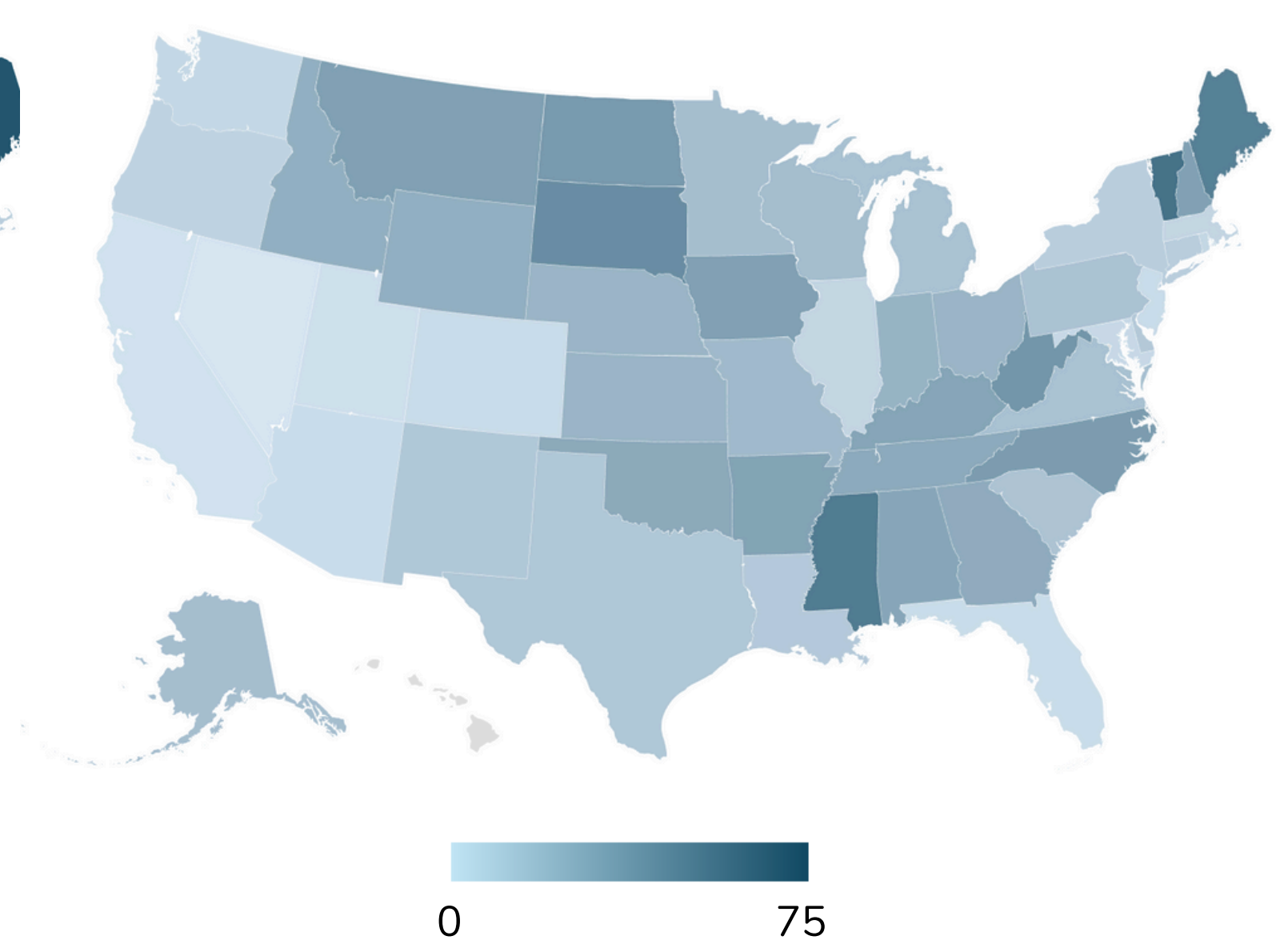
Source: [Why Rural Matters 2023](#)

- 15.7% of public school students attend a rural school.
- 29.3% of public schools are rural.
- The share of rural schools and students varies significantly by state.

Percent of Rural Public Schools



Percent of Public School Students in Rural Schools



## Experiences in High School

### Student Access to Counseling Services

Source: [Why Rural Matters 2023](#)

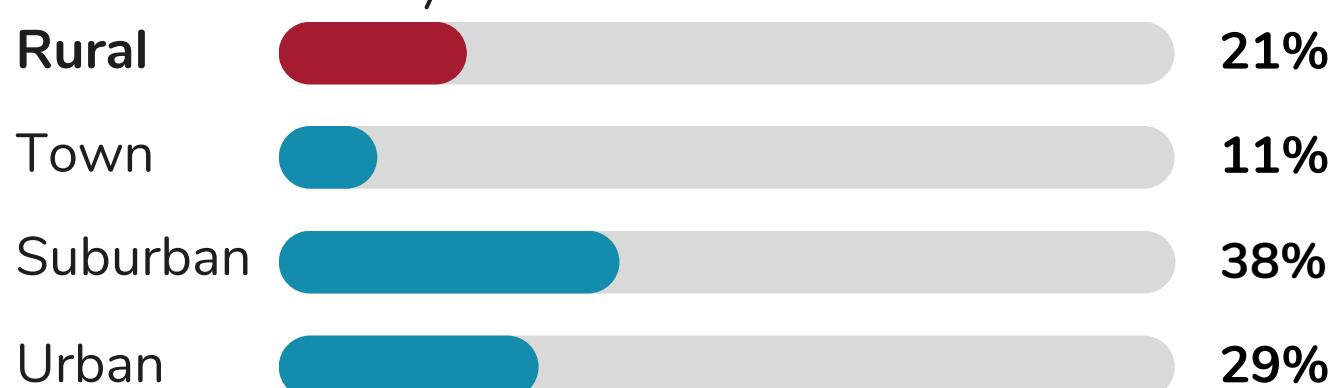
**310:1** average ratio of rural students to school counselor/psychologist

- average ratio in non-rural schools is 295:1
- American School Counselor Association recommends 250:1

### High School Coursework

#### Share of Students with AP Offered at HS

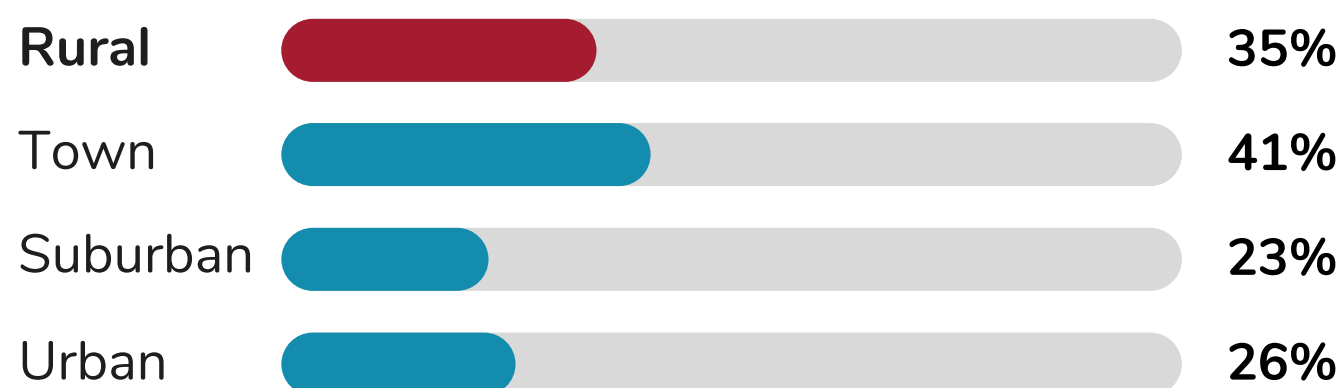
2015-16 school year



Source: [Center for American Progress Report 2021](#)

#### Dual Enrollment Participation

in 2019



Source: [Disparities in Access to and Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework, 2023](#)

#### Graduates Who Completed Calculus

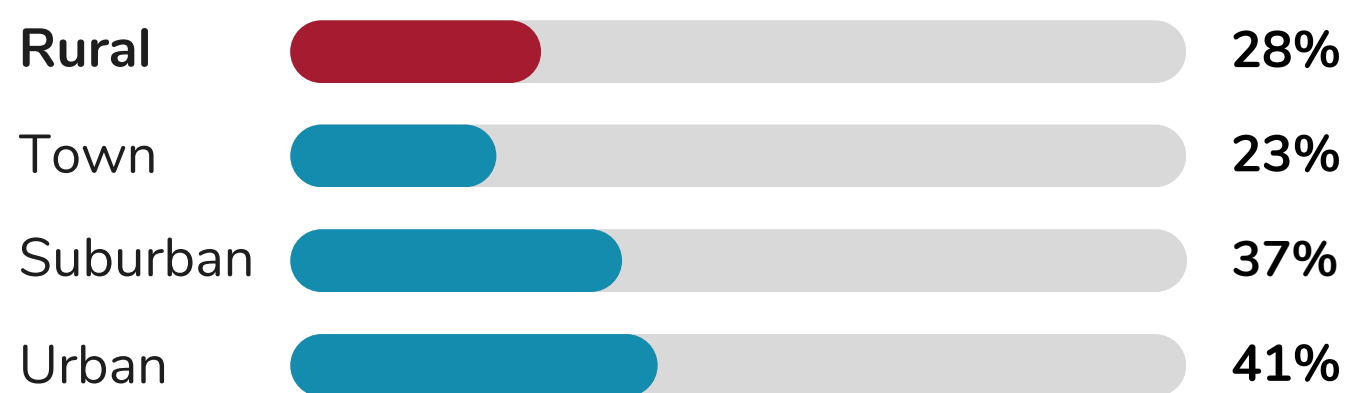
Class of 2019



Source: [Disparities in Access to and Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework, 2023](#)

#### Graduates Who Completed Advanced Science

Class of 2019



Source: [Disparities in Access to and Enrollment in Rigorous Coursework, 2023](#)

#### Graduates Who Took at Least One CTE Course

Class of 2019



Source: [Career and Technical Education Programs in Rural High Schools](#)



Human Services

Agriculture, food, and natural resources

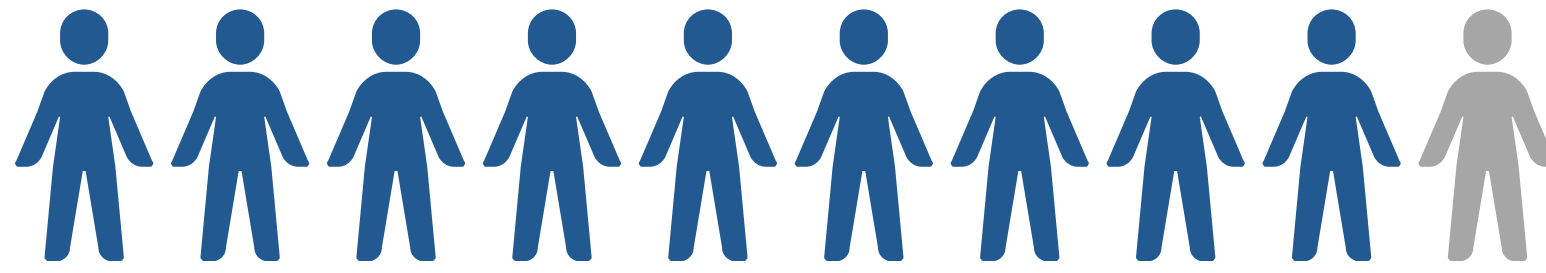
Information Technology

Business and marketing

Common CTE subject areas for rural students

## Educational Attainment

# 90%

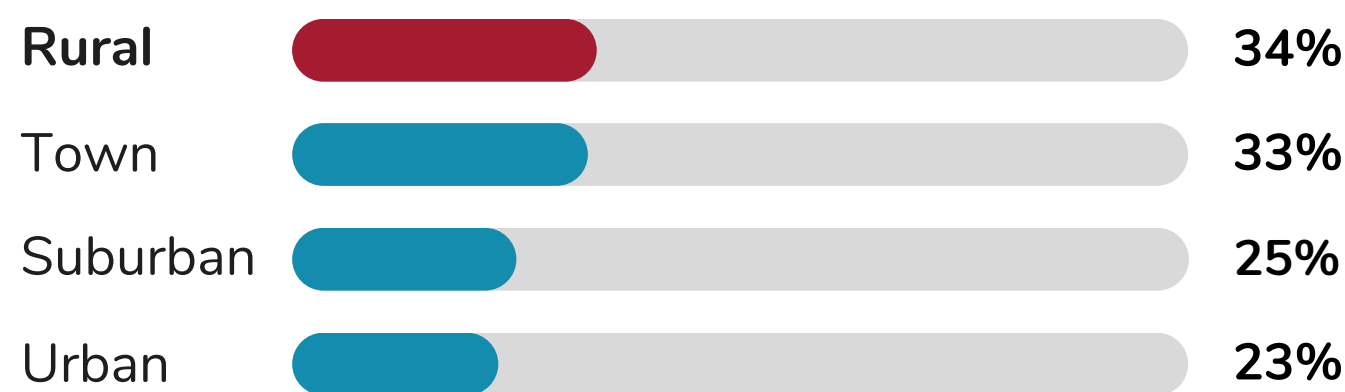


of rural students graduated high school within 4 years (class of 2019)

In comparison: towns 87%, suburban 89%, and urban 82%  
The average graduation rate across all locales was 87%.

Source: [NCES, 2023](#)

### High school diploma as Highest Educational Attainment



Source: [NCES Educational Attainment in Rural Areas, 2022](#)



In 2019, rural adults aged 25+ were most likely to hold a high school diploma, while those in cities and suburbs tended to have some college education.

## College Pathways

### FAFSA Filing

# 53%

from rural high schools completed FAFSA by June (class of 2023)

of students

In comparison: towns 48%, suburban 55%, urban 52%

Source: NCRERN's calculations based on the [National College Attainment Network \(NCAN\) FAFSA Tracker data](#)



### College enrollment

# 55%

from rural high schools (classified as rural or town) were enrolled in college in the fall immediately following graduation (class of 2022)

of students

In comparison: suburban 64%, urban 59%

Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)



# 62%

of rural high school graduates enrolled in college within 2 years

In comparison: suburban 70%, urban 65%

Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)

Among students who enroll in college

## 35%

of rural students enroll in 2 year college

In comparison: suburban 28%, urban 34%

Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)

Rural college enrollees are more likely to enter programs for

## HEALTH PROFESSIONS & RELATED CLINICAL SCIENCES

compared to their non-rural peers

## College Persistence

First year persistence rate

Class of 2020



Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)



Across all locales, first-year persistence is higher at 4-year colleges than 2-year colleges

## College Completion & Graduation

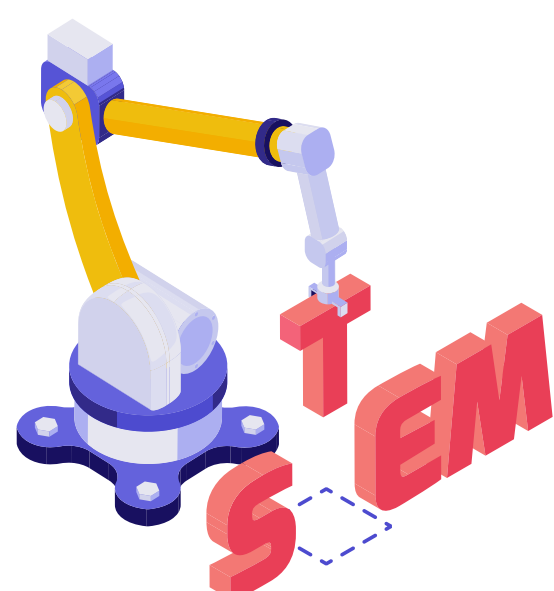
## 41%

of rural high school graduates completed a degree within 6 years of graduating high school (class of 2016)

In comparison: suburban 48%, urban 38%

	Rural High School	Suburban High School	Urban High School
Associate Degree	<b>11%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Bachelor's Degree	<b>29%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>30%</b>

Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)



## 12%

of rural high school graduates completed a STEM degree within 6 years (class of 2016)

In comparison: suburban 17%, urban 14%

Source: [NSC High School Benchmarks, 2023](#)