

RURAL STUDENT POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES

KEY STATS AND TRENDS

The data in this section comes from multiple sources, all using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of a rural school. NCES divides schools into four categories: rural, town, suburban, and urban. The statistics provided reflect nationwide trends, and links are included for more details on each one.

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.

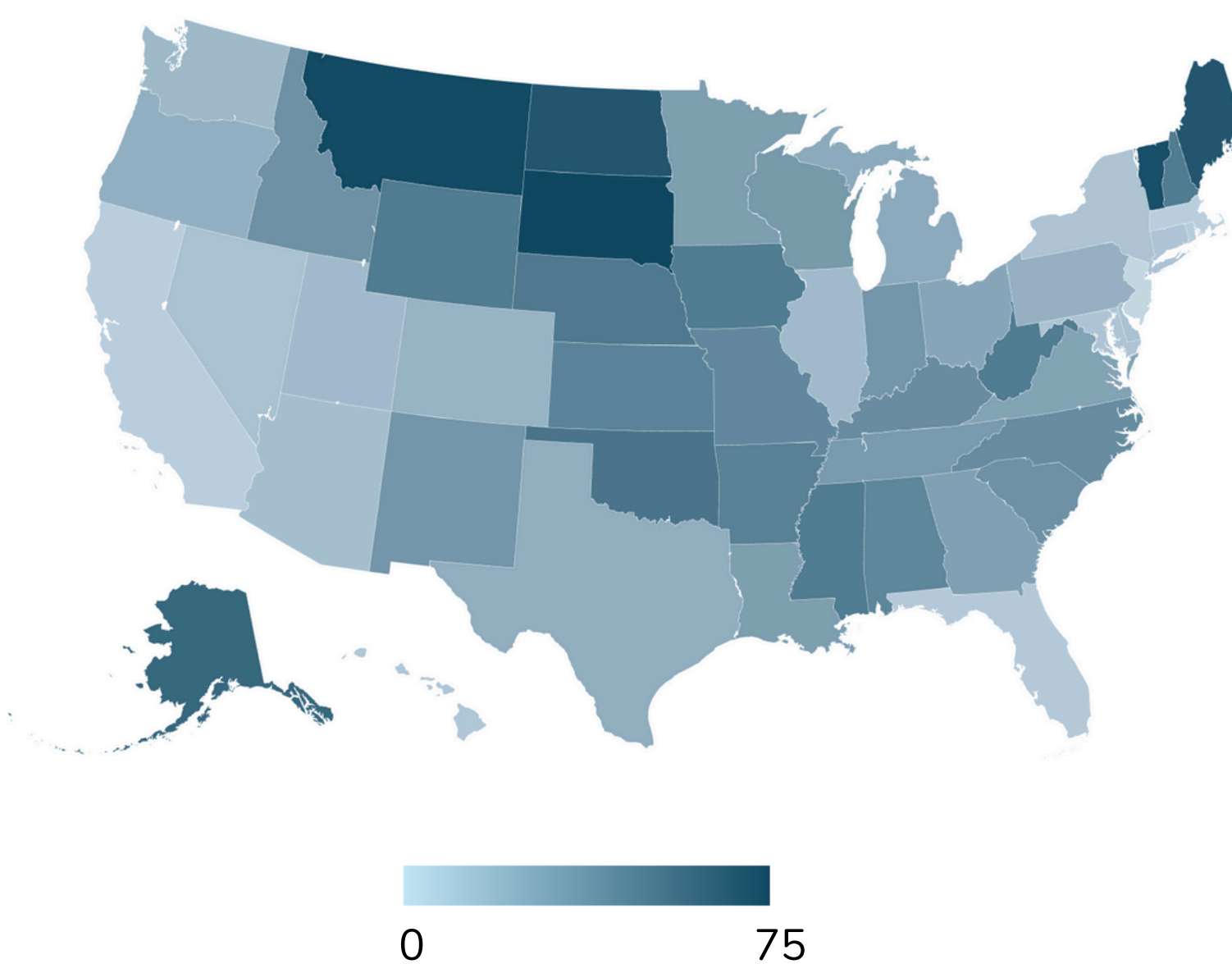
Rural Students

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

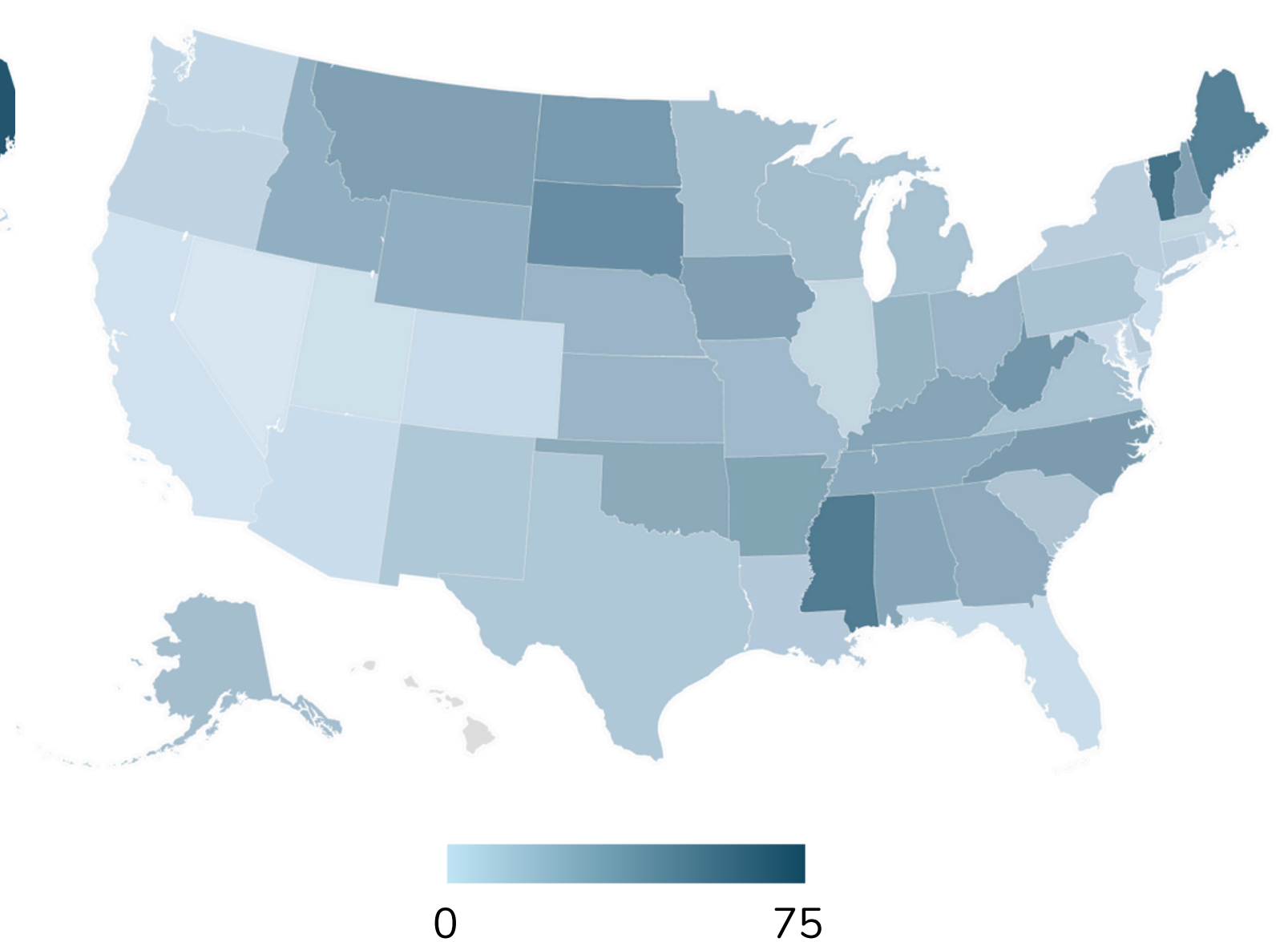
Source: [Why Rural Matters 2023](#)

- 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

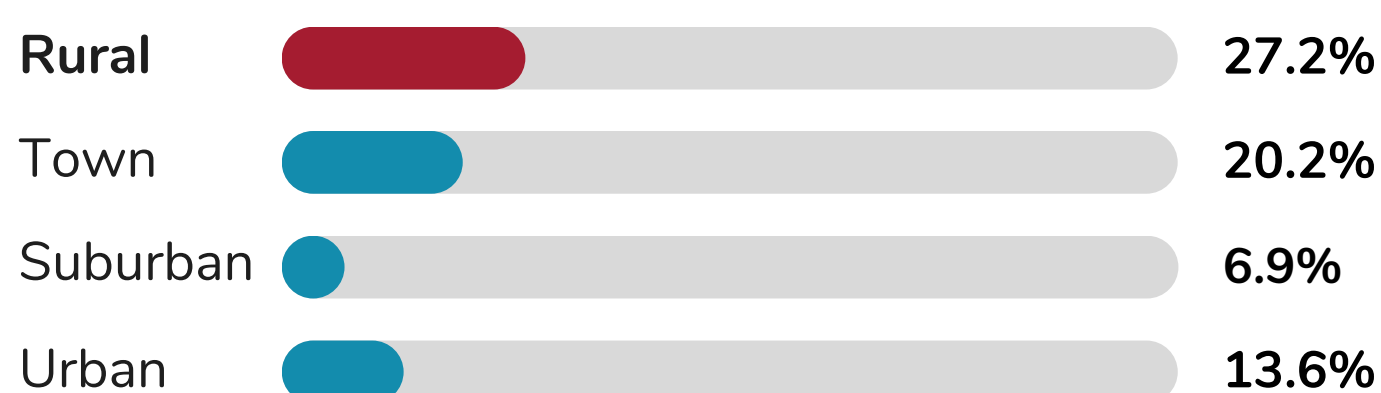
Source: [Why Rural Matters 2023](#)

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

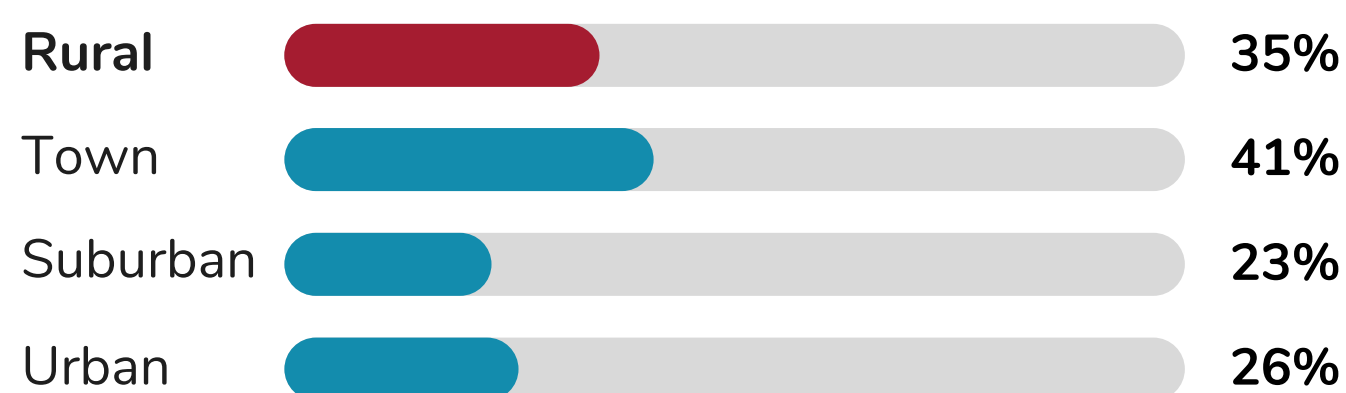
High School Coursework

Students without AP Courses (2015-16)



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

Dual Enrollment Participation (2019)



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

Graduates Who Completed Calculus

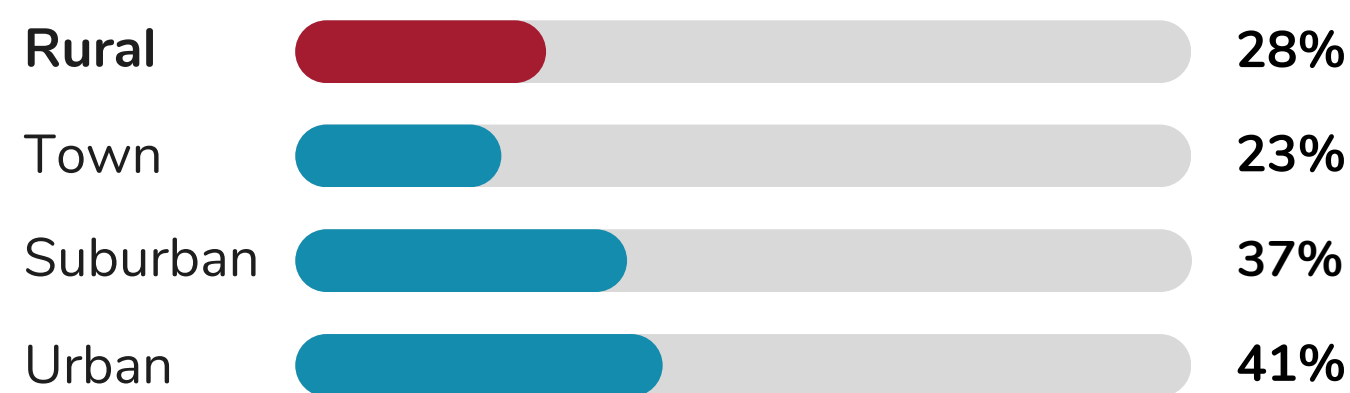
Class of 2019



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

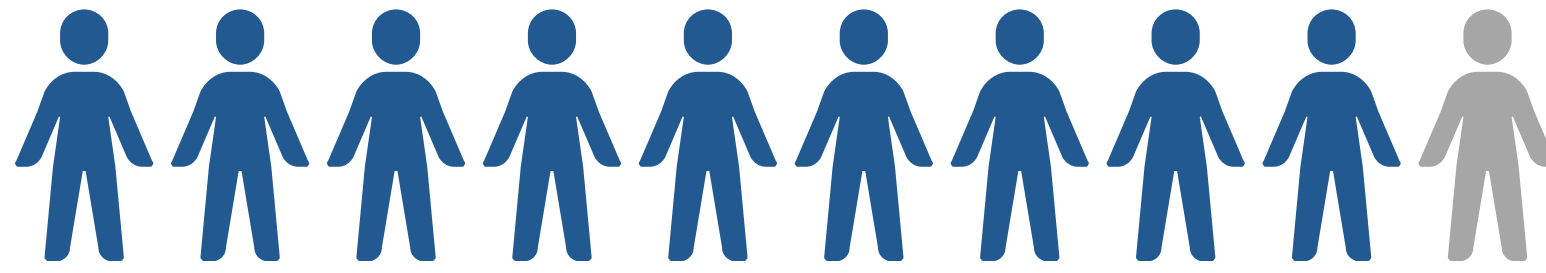
Information Technology

Business and marketing

Common CTE subject areas for rural students

Educational Attainment

90%

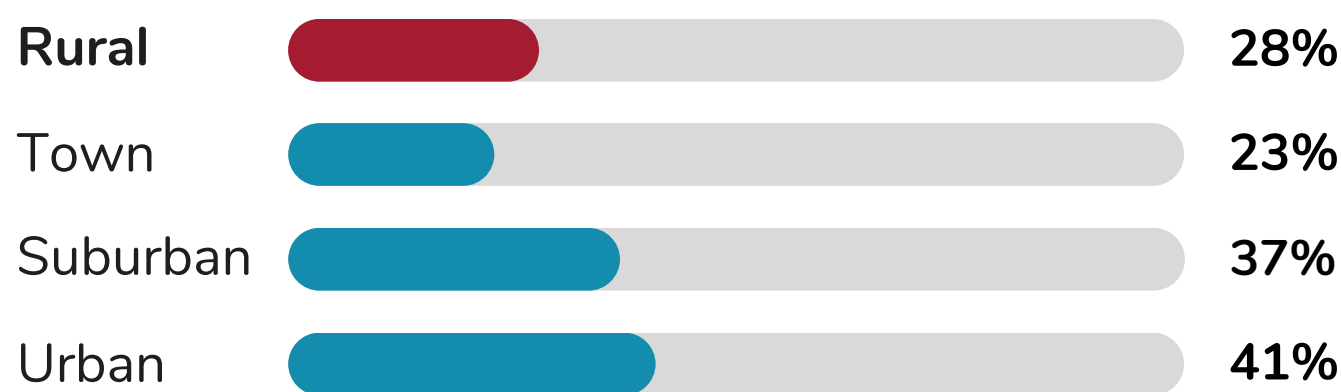


of rural students graduated high school within 4 years (class of 2019)

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

Source: [NCES, 2023](#)

highest level of educational attainment



High school diploma

Adults in cities and suburbs are most likely to have some level of college.

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

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](#)

35%

of rural students enroll in 2 year college

In comparison: suburban 28%, urban 34%

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



Student persistence is higher at 4-year colleges than 2-year colleges

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

College Completion & Graduation

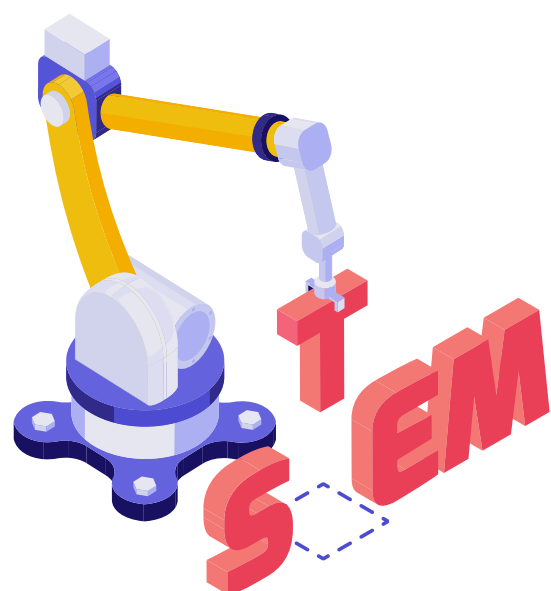
41%

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	11%	9%	8%
Bachelor's Degree	29%	39%	30%

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](#)