

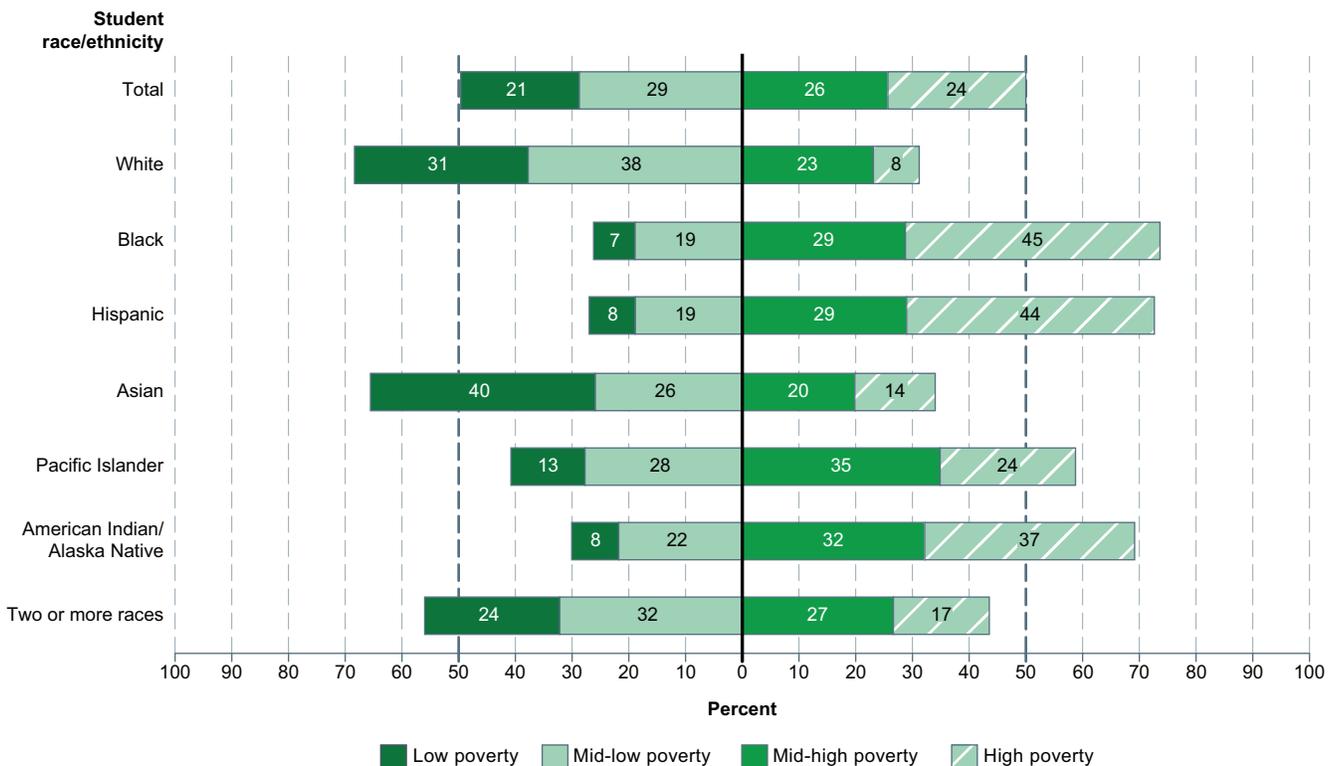
Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

In fall 2018, the percentage of students who attended high-poverty schools was highest for Black students (45 percent), followed by Hispanic students (44 percent), American Indian/ Alaska Native students (37 percent), Pacific Islander students (24 percent), students of Two or more races (17 percent), Asian students (14 percent), and White students (8 percent).

In the United States,¹ the percentage of students in a school who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides a proxy measure for the concentration of low-income students. In this indicator, public schools² (including both traditional and charter) are divided into categories by FRPL eligibility.³ Low-poverty schools are

defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public school students for each racial/ethnic group, by school poverty level: Fall 2018



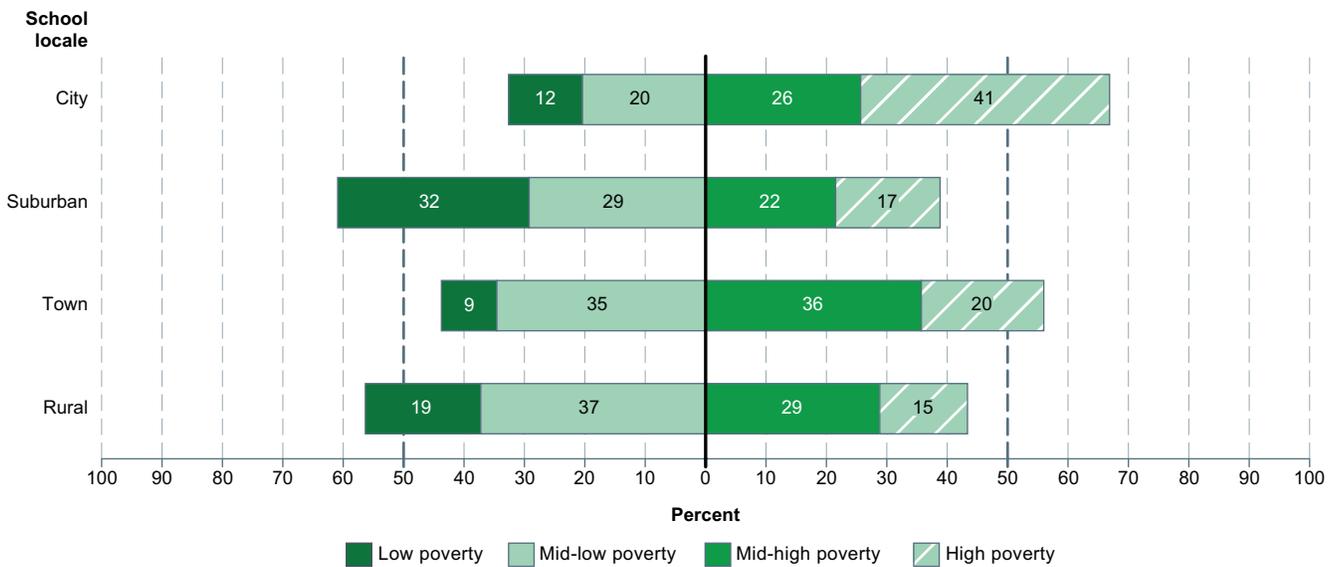
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a "process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications" (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post "[Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?](#)" Schools with missing FRPL data are not included in this figure. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Detail may not sum to 100 percent because of rounding and because schools with missing FRPL data are not included in this figure. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2018–19; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), "Public School File," 2018–19. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 216.60.

In fall 2018, the percentage of public school students in high-poverty schools was higher than the percentage in low-poverty schools (24 vs. 21 percent), and both percentages varied by race/ethnicity. The percentage of students who attended high-poverty schools was highest for Black students (45 percent), followed by Hispanic students (44 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (37 percent), Pacific Islander students (24 percent), students of Two or more races (17 percent), Asian students (14 percent), and White students

(8 percent). At the other end of the school poverty spectrum, a nearly opposite pattern is evident. The percentage of students who attended low-poverty schools was highest for Asian students (40 percent), followed by White students (31 percent), students of Two or more races (24 percent), Pacific Islander students (13 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native students (8 percent), Hispanic students (8 percent), and Black students (7 percent).

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of public school students for each school locale, by school poverty level: Fall 2018



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25.0 percent or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL); mid-low poverty schools are those where 25.1 to 50.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; mid-high poverty schools are those where 50.1 to 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL; and high-poverty schools are those where more than 75.0 percent of the students are eligible for FRPL. Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a “process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications” (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). For more information on eligibility for FRPL and its relationship to poverty, see the NCES blog post “Free or reduced price lunch: A proxy for poverty?” Schools with missing FRPL data are not included in this figure. Detail may not sum to 100 percent because of rounding and because schools with missing FRPL data are not included in this figure. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey,” 2018–19; and Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE), “Public School File,” 2018–19. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 216.60.

The percentage of students attending public schools with different poverty concentrations varied by school locale (i.e., city, suburban, town, and rural). In fall 2018, about 41 percent of students who attended city schools were in high-poverty schools, compared with 20 percent of students who attended town schools, 17 percent of students who attended suburban schools, and 15 percent

of students who attended rural schools. In contrast, 32 percent of students who attended suburban schools were in low-poverty schools, compared with 19 percent of students who attended rural schools, 12 percent of students who attended city schools, and 9 percent of students who attended town schools.

Endnotes:

¹ The United States is defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia in this indicator.

² In fall 2018, information on school poverty level was not available for less than 1 percent of public school students. This included schools for which information on FRPL was missing and schools that did not participate in the NSLP.

³ Students with household incomes under 185 percent of the poverty threshold are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch under the NSLP. In addition, some groups of children—such as foster children, children participating in the Head Start and Migrant Education programs, and children receiving services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act—are assumed to

be categorically eligible to participate in the NSLP. Data include students whose NSLP eligibility has been determined through direct certification, which is a “process conducted by the states and by local educational agencies (LEAs) to certify eligible children for free meals without the need for household applications” (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/direct-certification-national-school-lunch-program-report-congress-state-implementation-progress-1>). Also, under the Community Eligibility option, some nonpoor children who attend school in a low-income area may participate if the district decides that it would be more efficient to provide free lunch to all children in the school. For more information, see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp>.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 216.60

Related indicators and resources: [Characteristics of Children’s Families](#); [Characteristics of Elementary and Secondary Schools](#); [Mathematics Performance](#); [Reading Performance](#)

Glossary: Free or reduced-price lunch; Locale codes; National School Lunch Program; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group